

**DRAFT**

**TEN GROUP**

Summary of discussion at the fourth meeting, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2004, in Ealing

*Present:*

*Craig Anderson, Director of Environment, Reading Borough Council*

*Peter Bishop, Director of Environment, LB Camden*

*Paul Clark, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge*

*Marc Dorfman, Director of Regeneration, LB Ealing*

*Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, LB Southwark*

*David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, LB Haringey*

*Apologies:*

*John Best, Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council*

*Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning and Regeneration), LB Bexley*

*Phillip Goodwin, Director of Planning and Development, LB Croydon*

*Richard Simmons, Director of Development and Environment, Medway Council*

The meeting was preceded by a **walking tour** of the development sites around the railway and Ealing town centre.

A **briefing pack** was circulated beforehand providing background information on orchestrating investment, with a brief review of local finance in some innovative US and European cities which suggests that taxing land values is an important tool in funding improved infrastructure. Case studies were presented on improving infrastructure in Stratford, Croydon and Reading. The Stratford case study shows how City Challenge funding was used, along with other measures, to transform a run-down town centre. The Croydon Tramlink case study demonstrates the key role the local authority played in a partnership that has linked peripheral estates with major town centres. The Reading case study reminds us of how a town centre's attractions and prospects can be changed incrementally over time, and also provides an example of an innovative late night bus service to help young people get home. Along with these, Nicholas Falk's draft policy paper for CABE (which has been circulated) sets out some principles for linking 'intelligent taxation' to the goals of sustainable development. Attention was drawn to the Local Government Association's (LGA) proposals on local finance which recommend returning the business rate, but at present the only significant new 'freedoms' on offer are a version of the US Business Improvement District, and a Growth Incentive Scheme that will benefit authorities whose business rate yield exceeds the regional or national average.

The meeting began with a ***presentation*** by Marc Dorfman on Ealing town centre development, and the impact of the proposed tram.

The ***discussion session*** was divided into two parts: the Ealing case study and issues arising; and future action for the Ten Group re skilling and training planners.

Marc's presentation and the discussion around it covered the role of Ealing town centre and the state of retailing, the potential for new housing, the relationship between new development and transport, and how this is funded. This summary covers the presentation - the challenges for Ealing town centre - and discussion around some issues arising. MD posed the Group the question: should the tram go up the Broadway, or link through the new development and plug into the station, i.e. do you build North-South and create new spaces? Will the proposed tram route get people off the streets, and just deliver them into the station? Is this what is wanted?

### **Next meeting**

The fifth meeting of the Ten Group will take place on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March in Haringey. We will consider checklists for working with other agencies, and will pursue action on 'the way forward'.

We thought it would be helpful if, continuing on from Marc's presentation in Ealing, other members described the structures they each work in.

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## Ealing town centre and the West London tram

### *Context*

- Ealing town centre raises issues of improving accessibility and upgrading attractions, to secure urban quality. The centre is the largest of the six centres in the borough but is much smaller than Kingston or the new White City, with which it will compete. The town is very much the product of the Edwardian era, and the building of the District Line and the trams. There is a relatively prosperous catchment, and two-thirds in the past commuted to central London. However, today half the employment is in the Borough (and increasing). Growth sectors include the cultural industries clustered around the BBC and IT.
- Spend per head of population is high, but floor space in Ealing town centre is very limited, and ageing. New shops are not coming in, and no one is making a decision to review floorspace. There is enough shopping in general, but it needs upgrading. A facelift and environmental improvements would make a difference. There is a real opportunity to build a lot of housing.

### *Development*

- Ealing Station, which is cramped and outdated, is subject to proposals for building Cross Rail, possibly in a tunnel, and the West London Tram Link, which currently is intended to run along the Uxbridge Road. However there are other possibilities which could loop the tram round the town centre, and create a better interchange. At present the station provides a very poor gateway, and the immediate surroundings are quite seedy. In contrast the main shopping centre has the feel of a Continental boulevard, with its wide pavements, and choice of places to eat and drink.
- The Great Western Railway line runs alongside the town centre, and there may be some nine acres of land available for development in total, including a major car park site owned by the Council. There is a question of whether this should be developed piecemeal or to a masterplan, but to date no developer has come forward with a comprehensive proposal.
- The way to show that strong growth can be used to effect change, is to pack development into town centres - to look big and look dense. Ealing will launch an urban design action plan, and seek to create a step change in 'bringing forward buildings'.

### *Retailing*

- The ODPM has shifted to letting edge of centre retail schemes go. However, town centres find it hard to cope with change and are dying as a result. The assumption with town centre management (TCM) is that the private sector knows what to do, but the level of private sector people in a town centre cannot make decisions. The

usual calibre of TCM cannot deal with the private sector and cannot deliver change. Land use and TCM have often parted company.

- We lack conceptual frameworks. There is very rigid ‘no risk’ thinking that doesn’t allow for variation or innovation. People who plan supermarkets are as inflexible as people who plan transport. E.g. King’s Cross is trying to attract a supermarket but the deal is no car parking. Even though Sainsbury Camden Town is very successful with very limited parking, you can’t convince them that King’s Cross could be like this.
- What role can local authorities play in town centres? In Ealing they should ‘bend with the market’ – go with Ealing Studios and fallout from the BBC etc. BT have taken space in a new office block for their designers, and the borough is promoting a cultural quarter to the South of the town centre. If retailers are not building, then promote events e.g. around jazz culture. In Germany only poor go out-of-town, the prosperous shop in the town centres. Specialist shops can encourage interesting groups of people, as for example in Chiswick and Hampstead. Chelsfield and Argent at King’s Cross want to build around independents

#### *Tram proposals*

- Transport works arterially, with a focus on Ealing Broadway. The pattern is E-W; and N-S connections work with difficulty. Ealing Station is the fifth busiest in London, and the tram has been proposed as a means of reducing congestion. Travellers on it are expected to grow from the current 22 million who use the buses to 36 million. Currently the 607 bus stops 16 times in 20 minutes, whereas the tram will stop 50 times in the same period of time. 16 trams will carry the equivalent of 65 buses. This in turn will reduce congestion, particularly at crucial North South crossing points, thus greatly improving the overall traffic flow and improving the North-South link (between Harrow, Brent, Ealing and Heathrow).
- The tram has encountered strong local opposition from residents who fear rat running, and has little support from the other boroughs, such as Hammersmith. The GLA are now talking about a bond issue to fund it, as there are no longer the resources available. This in turn could lead to a search for cheaper options, and ways of securing wider regeneration benefits, as the scheme may need to be radically rethought (for example the tram could bypass much of Ealing town centre and run round in front of the station, while the station could be integrated into a new commercial development).

#### *Funding*

- Ealing town partnership is promoting a BID, and this is likely to be linked to the redevelopment of the outdated Arcadia Centre that is opposite the railway station. The Business Improvement District idea is one of 24 Pilot Projects, and will involve businesses contributing to the costs of improving the quality of the town centre.

- There is an opportunity to go much further, but this depends on the support of Network Rail as well as Transport for London, particularly if development bridges across the railway lines. Ealing is keen to realise the maximum value from land they own between the two civic office blocks, and have started to take the initiative by drawing up a development brief. It is likely that housing could provide the highest financial returns, and a mixed use scheme is expected.

*Points from discussion*

- Ealing must hang on to its catchment of young professionals and provide new retail north of Uxbridge Road. But there are problems with N-S pedestrian flow due to barriers, lights etc. Reconfiguring shopping centre and tube so that people move south through the centre must make sense. There should be a strong N-S link between the park to the north and the economic heartland to the south.
- If Ealing needs a mechanism to cross N-S, why does the tram need to link with the station. The tube and tram stations could be rethought, rather than welding them together. Is it necessary to bridge over the railway with a new structure, or can you tie the new sites together with the tram? If you took it through a new public square, the cost of the square could be put onto TfL and the tram.
- Infrastructure projects may not pay for themselves, but value is made by people on either side (e.g. Brooklyn Bridge went bust). Road building is made to pay for itself, and is seen as more closely tied to regeneration. But railways are seen as an expense. Nobody putting up a building in the next five years would consider how the tram could change the place, unless there are big incentives. No-one thinks that spaces around bring any value or change the way people think. Very few people can conceive mixed use scheme, so this must be local authority led.

*In summary:*

- A major problem of West London is lack of good public transport, and increasing congestion. There need to be better N-S links and interchanges for the growing numbers working in West London.
- Funding new infrastructure is proving very difficult
- The cost of housing is also a problem because it is a desirable area
- Therefore there is a need to secure large and intensive enough development. For example, the Portland Oregon tram was used to achieve urban renaissance with land alongside the railway station developed much more densely than the zoning code. Bonds were used to fund the tram system
- Ealing must decide whether to support the tram; and whether to do it in partnership with other authorities. The tram was seen as solving pressure on the Heathrow corridor, BUT West London has grown new jobs, so people work locally. The tram provides an opportunity to rethink the roles of the different centres.

## Planning skills and training

### *The challenge*

- It is hard for local authorities to find planners and urban designers of any calibre both because of a drop in interest and competition from the private sector.
- Planning training is not relevant to the skills required in planning today. We have achieved a deprofessionalisation of the development control system – a large part of the work is pure process and no traditional planning skills are needed. On the other, regeneration requires a more strategic and impresarial approach.
- There is a danger that district councils will be bypassed by the GLA taking a proactive role. Here different approaches are needed. For example, in very disadvantaged areas UDCs would have put in hit-teams. Southwark have used a team of three or four people as impresarios, working with consultants (at a cost of £1 million) to carry on in the Elephant and Castle when a private initiative had collapsed.

### *The Ealing approach*

- Ealing's Regeneration department has 12 people in two teams – one dealing with urban design, major projects, and asset management; and the other with economic development and regeneration (which is working with new principles – job brokerage and growing businesses). A strategy will be rolled out in April, and Ealing will launch an urban design action plan with the aim of achieving a step change in bringing forward quality buildings.
- The urban design team has three young planners who are taking the planning department by storm. They are outgoing with good social skills (they are antipodean/South African), and they have been put through an urban design MA.
- Consultants have been hired to work with them and they have produced 100 mini-planning and urban design briefs in three months.
- There is a regular Monday morning session spent on town planning. They look at virtual reality models of town centres [it costs around £11,000 to 'build' Ealing Broadway town centre. This is done by mapping photos onto a street using Ordnance Survey].
- Ealing does not need the team's input all week, and would like them to have experience of other and larger schemes. Marc raised the idea of seconding them to the GLA, or to other members of the Ten Group.

### *Opportunities for 'fast-tracking'*

- To attract and retain good people you must give them exciting jobs, and this is within the local authority's power. They have many centres and a range of projects. They could create a stimulating, learning environment that restores the idea that planning is exciting.

- Ealing's young team and its achievements are very impressive. Paul Evans suggested recruiting a small team as a 'joint local authorities office' or a virtual federation of the Ten Group members. This would operate as a quasi-consultancy system, and second in as necessary.
- Paul Evans suggested a 'fast-tracking' system for young planners (as exists in the Civil Service).
- The skills set needs to embrace architecture and design. Urbanism centres rather than architecture centres could be an answer, but these do not deliver what you want. There are no courses that would help at present.
- Could a bespoke course be set up to help bring young planners on? Might the Planning Delivery Grant be put into an academic institution to work on major projects? The Ten Group has a lot of purchasing power for training. If you know what you want you can ask for it, but working with academic institutions and their agendas may not be easy.
- A federation could be much more effective, seconding staff between member authorities. A virtual federal approach is favoured.

#### *A role for the Ten Group*

- The Ten Group is about building capacity – both for members and for those they wish to bring on.
- Interesting ideas have emerged from each meeting and could be written up and used along with the briefing material to pass on to others.
- Disseminating ideas could also be done through some form of exchange around a project, working in a team to grapple with a problem.
- While the Group has a lot of purchasing power for training, it will not necessarily be easy, or effective, to get an academic institution to produce the right bespoke course. Institutional inertia and conflicting agendas are concerns. There would similarly be difficulties in working with architecture/urbanism centres.
- Action learning is the way forward
- The Group is also at the cutting edge of sustainable communities. It would be much better to operate a virtual federation with an action learning approach. The Group itself has the expertise and experience it needs to pass on to others.
- Following the Ealing approach, the Group could develop young planners thru an exchange of experience

#### *Suggestions included:*

- Disseminate lessons from the Group's experience, e.g. produce a publication
  - The Group could run a seminar with three to five from each member authority
  - Have an afternoon with those in planning training, e.g. heads of planning schools to begin a process of changing the way people are educated and developed
- Start a federal sharing with shadowing opportunities

- Marc's young planners could provide a start: seconding them to other authorities, they would gain experience and influence others in the way they work
- Members could each select 2 or 3 young planners for 'fast-tracking' and second them to other authorities' projects
- The Group could organize structured workshops with two or three members and involving young planners

*Action points for discussion at the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ten Group:*

- 1) Discuss the steps in setting up a fast-track action learning project:
  - What planning proposals would each Group member select for use?
  - Which two or three young planners would each member select?
  - How would a seconded team work with existing teams?
  - What would be the format for the action learning team?
  - What would be the format for the presentation to the Ten Group?
- 2) Suggestions made at the formation of the group included a study tour, conference and publication. These could be reconsidered
- 3) The Group's experience is worth passing on. Should we write up case studies and key points that have emerged from discussion, and in what format or style?
- 4) The view of the members at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting was that the Ten Group should continue beyond its pilot year which ends in May. site visits to other authorities are valued, and the Group wants the opportunity to visit all the members (and other places in addition – Brighton was mentioned). The discussions have raised and aired important issues, and the briefing material is very useful (Marc Dorfman passes copies round his department.)
- 5) Funding would be needed for future action. Craig Anderson mentioned using Planning Delivery Grant.
- 6) The future action paper on using the network and experience of the Ten Group to negotiate greater freedoms for their authorities had been circulated but was not discussed further at the meeting. Should we consider it properly?

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