

## Ealing Civic Society Trustees' Report 2019/20

This report has been prepared by Ann Chapman, Acting Chairman of Ealing Civic Society, based on her report to the membership at the Society's AGM held on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2020, having been postponed from earlier in the year. The report has been approved by the Executive Committee of the Society, who are the trustees.

The year has of course been overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected so many aspects of our lives. Unlike some organisations, we can be thankful that its impact on us has not been overwhelming. Also, unlike many charities, we are not dependent on grant funding or fund-raising activities, we have no employees to support and our membership has not deserted us. Although live events have had to be cancelled, we have been carrying on virtually.

The strap line of the Society is *'Working to Preserve and Improve our Borough'*. Threats to the character and heritage of the borough have been a constant feature of the Society's history and are as real today as over 50 years ago at its formation. This last year has seen further activity on some established developments, some have stalled and new ones emerged. Despite the pandemic, major housing led 'regeneration' schemes continue to be proposed with, it seems, tower blocks of minimal flats seen as the only game in town. These show little or no sensitivity to the heritage of local architecture, and we continue to campaign for better.

A major aspect of our work is the oversight of planning applications submitted to the Council as Planning Authority. A small 'environment committee' meets approximately every three weeks and has studied and commented on many applications both large and small, where we have judged their impact to be detrimental to our environment.

This year, we have seen a number of applications for ever taller tower blocks across the borough, and we have joined with residents and other amenity groups in submitting objections to many, including proposals in North Acton and Southall, at the listed Hoover building in Perivale, at the Gurnell Leisure Centre site, in West Ealing and most recently for the demolition and redevelopment of the Council's own office accommodation at Perceval House in Central Ealing. Another notable challenge has been to a proposed demolition of a fine Arts & Crafts house in Hanwell, which remains under consideration at the time of writing.

We have also continued with our regular email news updates to our membership and our three newsletters sent either electronically or in printed form to that membership. These are always well-received and we are gradually converting more of the membership to entirely electronic communication. The Society's website is regularly updated with news and events, as is our Facebook page. We also post frequent tweets and retweets concerning planning and other issues.

We have been able to hold all our usual events, although not expanded the programme as might have been possible in normal circumstances. These events included our annual lecture in May, this year incorporating the unveiling of our commemorative plaque to scientist Ada Lovelace with a talk about her work. Later in the year, we also unveiled a second plaque, for Nicky Hopkins the session musician.

We marked Civic Day in June with a repeat of our walk 'In the Footsteps of Soane' from Pitzhanger Manor to the Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn, noting many interesting buildings on the way.

We supported Open House weekend in September and finally, we held our award ceremony in October at which the beautifully renovated Pitzhanger Manor received the Society's award.

Moving into 2020, we held this year's annual lecture virtually, with a lecture given by Harbinder Birdi on the Thames Tideway Tunnel project, an amazing engineering feat that will also deliver some impressive riverside public realm. The virtual event, a first

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for us, was judged to be a success with a number of both members and non-members watching it live. We also have a recording\* of the lecture on our new YouTube channel for anyone to watch on 'catch up'. Our AGM was also held as a virtual event .and, following the formal business, our past chairman Robert Gurd gave a short and thought-provoking talk on the subject of 'Ealing's Architectural Gems'.

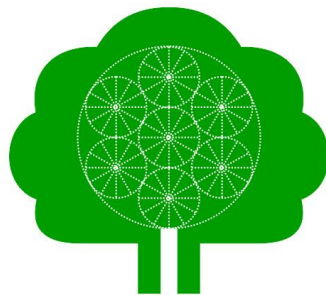
Also during the year, we were a founder member of the *Friends of the Victoria Hall*. Victoria Hall is part of the Grade II listed Ealing Town Hall, originally built using publicly subscribed money and to be run by a charitable Trust. The Friends were formed to safeguard the future of the Victoria Hall for the people of Ealing and to challenge the Council's proposed disposal of the Town Hall to a hotel developer. Preservation of heritage assets such as the Town Hall and Victoria Hall is fundamental to the purpose of the Civic Society.

On the financial front, as noted earlier, the Society is fortunate not to have been financially impacted by the pandemic. As reported by our treasurer at the AGM, our financial position continues to be strong, with membership subscriptions covering our in-year costs, and healthy reserves. In line with good practice, the Executive committee has reviewed these reserves and approved a number of disbursements in support of our charitable objectives. We will continue this approach in the coming years.

I should like to end this report by saying that the work of the Society would not be possible without the hard work and support of my fellow trustees and other members on our Executive and Communications committees. My thanks go to them all. Two Executive committee members stood down during the year. All other committee members, including those holding officer positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, were re-elected at the AGM. Although our trustees have no limit on the length of term they may serve, the Executive committee has also agreed that, following principles of good governance, we should actively seek new members with new ideas to refresh our committee. Despite regular appeals to the membership, finding those with the time and inclination to get involved is proving a hard task. Similarly, we have been unable to find anyone prepared to come forward as a potential chairman, so we enter a second year in the somewhat unsatisfactory position of having only an acting chair.

The Society would like to be in the position to initiate new projects and to take on more local campaigning activity, but our resources do not allow this at present. However, the trustees consider that the Society remains relevant and plays a vital part in '*Working to Preserve and Improve our Borough*'.

\* <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFI2zEj19QwAUU7-NfxDS8w>



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