



Wandsworth Society

Newsletter January 2011

A new 20mph speed limit on local streets ?

Wandsworth Environment Forum's meeting with Cllr Ravi Govindia

Lowering the speed limit on local residential and shopping streets in Wandsworth has been an issue various amenity societies and other local groups have become more and more concerned with. The benefits are becoming clearer and clearer – fewer road deaths and injuries, safer streets for our children, quieter and less polluted local neighbourhoods. Already nearly 5 million people in England live in urban areas where 20mph has been made the default speed limit, either permanently or on a trial basis. The momentum is gathering pace, and Islington has just become the first London borough to adopt the new limit.

Wandsworth Environment Forum (WEF), which links up local organizations and individuals interested in the environment, decided to raise the issue with Cllr Ravi Govindia, the Cabinet Member responsible for Transportation. The Council has, of course, already accepted many of the arguments in favour of a lower speed limit. It has introduced 20mph on streets where schools are situated, and, earlier this year, it set up a large 20mph zone across the whole Shaftesbury Estate in Battersea. On 19 October, Denny Gray (WEF chair) led a group of us, including Jonathan Callaway (Vice-Chair of the Putney Society), to have a wider discussion of the issue with Ravi Govindia, who was accompanied by two Council officers.

We also put a concrete plan to him. We proposed that the Council set up a small Working Group to examine the suitability, or otherwise, of reducing the standard speed limit on most Council roads (ie excluding major thoroughfares) from 30 to 20mph. The Working Group could comprise interested

Councillors and selected individuals from amenity societies and other local groups. With the assistance of Council officers, all aspects of the idea would be looked at, with specific reference to its suitability, or otherwise, in Wandsworth.

A good discussion was had. Ravi Govindia expressed his provisional reservations about the wisdom of lowering the speed limit. He pointed out, entirely correctly, that the idea would have to be acceptable to the Wandsworth community as a whole if it was to be successful. We stressed the reasons for the Council to think about the issue across the borough generally, rather than continuing with its ad hoc, street by street approach. We also argued that the Working Group would involve little or no expenditure, and only limited staff time. We left him with a paper marshalling the evidence and arguments that are persuading more and more local authorities to adopt a 20mph speed limit.

Councillor Govindia agreed to meet with WEF again, and in any case no later than early April 2011.

If anyone would like to see the actual documents we left with him, or has questions they would like answered, please get in touch with Robert Molteno (Wandsworth Friends of the Earth) at
Robert.molteno@googlemail.com
or phone him at 020 7223 0408.

It could be you

The Wandsworth Society has been invited to send a representative to the Wandsworth Environmental Forum - perhaps this could be you? If you are interested in the greener aspects of the Society's interests, such as recycling, sustainable development, etc., and are able to attend bi-monthly meetings at the Town Hall please call Valerie on 8767 3814. It would not take too much time and would keep you very well informed. We ask only that you provide a short report so that the Society can take action when required.

Cover

Could not resist putting a photograph of a December snowy scene on the cover, the more so as what was planned was a photograph of a Combined Sewage Overflow doing its stuff and overflowing.

At the moment the weather is perfect for a decent bit of overflowing, but also a perfect disincentive for popping out with the camera.

The windmill in Windmill Road – yes the same windmill pictured on page 34 of the Bedside.

Wandsworth Society

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A view from the chair ...

Forty years ago the decision was made for a splinter group to break off from the Putney Society, which had become very big indeed, to concentrate specifically on the interests of the area around Wandsworth Common and the Town Centre. We know that was a good decision, the Wandsworth Society having flourished all these years.

We are now in the age of The Big Society, a description that does not describe our current membership, so, alas, I must continue my exhortations for us all to bring in new members – or at least bring friends to events so they can have a look for themselves at what we do and perhaps to join us. We need active members certainly, but also numbers of residents to represent if we are to maintain our clout.

We have, in the last months, gratefully received several volunteers to work on various committees but unfortunately Linda Ulrich, who chaired the Roads & Transport Sub-committee, has had to resign. We are deeply grateful to Linda for her service during which time she has kept an eagle eye on the “whims and arrows” (not always outrageous) of Transport for London, Wandsworth Council, London Buses and whomsoever has the franchise for our local railways, and will be sorely missed. And of course, we need a replacement ...

It will be tempting to rely on the newly formed Wandsworth Living Streets to look after our interests but that is neither sufficient nor fair as they too, being the old Pedestrian Association by another name, need people to join their pressure group and whilst interests overlap, they do not represent the interests of all our members.

For example, the Roads & Transport Sub-committee has just begun a survey

of street signs in Multon Road with a view to requesting the Council to reduce their signage to an acceptable level. As a Society we would like to run a major campaign on street signs but alas do not have enough people to do it, so this group decided to start small and it would be good to think this work could continue and cover more and more streets, not least Wandsworth High Street.

Any volunteers?

Another matter of concern is the demise of the Nature Study Centre on Wandsworth Common. It has been empty for some time now, and I understand that a new tenant is being sought for this building which, under the terms on which it was permitted to be built on common land, must be used “to encourage participation in environmental activities and increase people’s understanding of the natural world through environmental education, interpretation and events”.

I remember, when I first moved back to Wandsworth in the early 90s, how impressed I was to read in the local Guardian not only that there was to be this brand new Nature Study Centre but a full-time Ecology Officer to work in it! It is my understanding that it has been well used by local schools over the years. Who can take it on? Any ideas please direct to Charles Walton, Chairman of the Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee (MAC) telephone 8874 1119 waltoncharles@hotmail.com

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Thames Water's perspective on the Thames

The Society's meeting on 23 November 2010 was a fascinating evening. A talk to explain the rationale behind the mammoth new Thames Tunnel Project given by Malcolm Orford, Project Manager for the Thames Tunnel for Thames Water, together with his colleague Gareth Thomas, who explained some of the technical aspects of the construction of the Tunnel.

This is a report of their presentation. The Society's response to Thames Water's proposals is on page 6.

Two hundred years ago, Londoners had no running water but did have cesspits. If your pit was full you dug another. Then piped water was brought in which increased water useage hugely. This meant the cesspits filled more quickly so Londoners connected them to the many streams running into the Thames. And so the Thames became a sewer and a dead river. The problem grew until a particularly hot summer in 1858, the year of 'The Great Stink'; Parliament removed to the country, businesses were disrupted and the smell of untreated sewage was overpowering ... something had to be done.

Joseph Bazalgette devised a plan to build intercepting sewers on both banks of the Thames. These conduits took the sewage from the streams before they reached the Thames and channelled the waste down to the Thames Estuary. This is still a key part of our current sewage system today.

In London there is usually only one pipe from each property which takes rainwater as well as waste. Any overflow from the system as a whole goes directly into the Thames through CSOs (Combined Sewage Overflows). Did you know that it takes about 3 months for anything put into the Thames in Central London to reach the Thames Estuary and leave the tidal stretch of the river? The overflow problem isn't helped by so many houses concreting over their gardens and more and more building on what was previously open land; natural ways for the rain to soak away gradually are being removed – such that as little as 2mm of rain can lead to an overflow.

A further problem is the speed of waste water flowing through the pipes – there is sometimes more than the tunnels can cope with.

Malcolm then outlined some ways to solve the problem

1. there could be a separate system installed to take rainwater (as distinct from sewage) away

from houses and other buildings; but this could take 35 to 50 years to do, would be massively expensive and cause London to grind to a standstill.

2. Bubblers are used now to aerate the water in the Thames so enabling fish to breathe and Skimmers are used to remove anything floating.
3. The Thames Tunnel is proposed which will cost £3.6bn. This will be funded by anyone in the region who pays a wastewater bill. Bills will increase by just over £1 per week by 2018 – there is no public funding for the project, either from the UK or the EU.

The proposal is that sewage will be intercepted before it reaches the CSOs, and be taken down shafts the equivalent of 14 storeys deep to the huge Thames Tunnel, under all the other tunnels that currently exist. The Tunnel will mainly follow the route of the river down to the Beckton Sewage Treatment Works. This project will be unable to eliminate completely any discharges into the Thames but instead of happening 50 to 60 times a year, it is estimated to be only 2 or 3 times a year. And any such discharge will be far more dilute than at present. Associated with the Tunnel project are upgrades of sewage treatment facilities and the Lee River tunnel is underway.

A major challenge is that there is no spare land in London on which to build. During the 5 to 7 years of construction, land is needed near to sewage outlets to house equipment, supplies, drilling kit etc – but after completion, only air vent towers (10metres high), some with associated buildings to house ventilation equipment to draw any smelly air from the Tunnel and filter it before discharge, and manholes (for access) will be needed with the rest of the construction sites being returned to public spaces. Thames Water (bill payers!) will pay for any landscaping at the end of the project.

There will be disruption locally at each of the

building sites although current logistics practice is to hold supplies offsite until needed. However HGV movements for the removal of spoil (though barges on the river can be used in some cases) and for the arrival of the large precast sections which will line the Tunnel will cause problems in local areas. During the sinking of the shafts, there will be intense activity for a short period with perhaps 1 or 2 HGVs arriving each hour. Sites will have some 30 to 40 vehicles arriving per day although there will be regulated times of arrival and parking times with contractors to oversee problems. Any river barges used will have to be loaded and unloaded somewhere – this too needs to be considered. The building process will be carried out with varying intensity during the period so inevitably there will be traffic and other congestion.

After engineering consideration, 22 construction sites have been identified as needed in London. Wandsworth has a long stretch of the Thames as well as more CSOs than other Boroughs so relatively more sites are needed here. Seven areas are under consideration in the Wandsworth area (the current preferred locations are shown below in brackets – there are also sites in each area less favoured by Thames Water)

1. Barn Elms (southern end)
2. Putney Bridge (upstream on the south side foreshore)
3. Bell Lane Creek (between Dormay Street and Frogmore)
4. King Georges Park (northern end of King Georges Park)
5. Jews Row (foreshore near Wandsworth Bridge)
6. Bridges Court (car park near Prices Candles factory)
7. Tideway Walk (downstream from Battersea Power station near Kirtling Street)

Go and have a look at the sites near where you live (see www.thamestunnelconsultation.co.uk) for more info – and check the effect that construction will have on the area; traffic problems, the loss of trees or the impact on wildlife or other amenities in the short and the long term, the impact of any residual buildings, the change or damage to the foreshore.

What the final buildings on the sites will look like is not yet decided; and any land bought under Compulsory Purchase Orders which is surplus to final needs will have to be offered back to the former owners. This solution to the current waste problem should cope with future climate change, with increased population in London and - so long as future buildings have a rainwater outlet as well as a sewage pipe - should last as long as Bazalgette's solution.

The first public consultation has been extended to 14th January 2011 so if you read this in time, do submit your comments. There will be a second public consultation, on similar lines, in mid 2011. Thames Water really want to hear from the public and have undertaken to respond to queries and suggestions. The Planning submission should be made in 2012 with construction starting in 2013 for completion in 2020 (when Defra has confirmed to the EU that the Tunnel will be working).

This huge project will happen, for the overall benefit of London – but we locals have the chance to have our say as to how and where and what thereafter.

Jenny Massey

Has localism gone too far?

Should we be worried – or is this a sensible devolvement of power to democratic control?

The GLA, the Mayor and the London Boroughs have all agreed that they want a whole series of quangos to devolve to London. These include:

**The Royal Parks : The Port of London Authority
The London Development Agency : Thames Gateway Development Corporation : Rail Franchises : Dial-a-Ride, NHS Patient Transport, Taxi Card.**

Some of these seem a reasonable proposition, but the PLA is not happy and there is resistance to the London Parks idea because funding will revert to

London and there is the fear that ever-increasing money-raising events will be needed, spoiling the ambience of the parks.

It is also suggested that the Metropolitan Police should come under the joint control of the Mayor and the Assembly, and that London should have strengthened Waste & Recycling powers.

The Mayor does not agree with the boroughs about raising the thresholds before it is necessary to refer a building scheme to him for approval.

Boroughs suggest building heights of 60m and housing numbers of 1000 should be the threshold. We are not being asked to comment on any of the above.

The saving of the Thames

or an expensive irrelevance?

We have given much thought to Thames Water's proposals to clean up the river. This is the text of the Society's letter sent to Thames Water as our response to the first round of consultation.

This Society agrees with Thames Water that it is not acceptable for it to continue to discharge raw sewage into the Thames and that doing nothing about it is not an option. It might perhaps have been better for TW to have reached this conclusion before the threat of 'infraction proceedings', and heavy fines by the EU. However, what it is now proposing to do is certainly open to question.

It is relatively easy to assess and comment on the pros and cons of details, such as the preferred (or alternative) shaft sites for the tunnel. However, lack of information, and misleading information, have given the impression that the tunnel is the only means of cleaning up the Thames. It may be TW's preferred solution, but it is not the only solution, and it deals with only a small percentage of sewage pollution. We consider a fundamental assessment of the problem should be provided to allow a considered public response.

We are concerned that the required environmental impact assessment (European EA Directive) of the shaft-construction sites has not been done before the consultation process. Appraisal of the impact of construction and of the permanent structures is thus limited.

TW states that 39,000,000 cubic tonnes of sewage is discharged into the Thames every year from the CSOs (Combined Sewage Overflows), but we learn from other sources that this liquid quantity is a mixture of excess surface water and sewage. The sewage-derived solids from the CSOs actually amount to 10,000 tonnes dry waste, of which up to 40% is probably inorganic grit that settles without harm and causes little nuisance. We also learn that sewage from the CSOs accounts for only 10% of the total in the river and that there is a considerable element of the waste that is not 'sewage' in the accepted sense but other detritus such as leaves, bottles, plastic bags, etc.

Importantly, TW gives no information on the amount of discharge into the Thames from the Sewage Treatment Works, in particular from Mogden. This is an extraordinary omission since we learn that at present it accounts for about 80% of the problem in the upper tideway. Indeed we learn that if the three STWs ceased to discharge sewage or chemicals into the river, water quality would improve by 83-93%. Seeking information on how much sewage will still come from Mogden after its planned increase in storage capacity, results only in the less than precise information that it will be 'a considerable improvement'. Mogden, we learn, also regularly discharges what are called 'treatment works mixed liquors' into the Thames that result in oxygen consumption and are a major factor in fish deaths.

It seems to us that the environmental damage to be caused by the construction of the tunnel for such a limited benefit as the removal of, at most, 10% of the sewage is unsustainable. However, should better sense not prevail we comment below on the three sites chosen for the area of the borough covered by our Society (Wandsworth town).

a) Bell Lane Creek. Panorama Antennas is a very important employer and its removal would be a considerable loss. We therefore consider that the alternative site should be used. The alternative site would seem to be better placed for the work and is equally accessible from the same roads. It would use a relatively small part of the Wandsworth Council Depot, mainly entailing the loss of some parking space, and would only marginally impede the working of the depot. We fully support the representation made by Panorama Antennas against the loss of their site.

b) King George's Park. We think the use of the open space for two years and the permanent hard standing and structure to be left afterwards is not acceptable. Open green space is finite and very valuable in this part of the town. In addition, since the discharge from CSOs is caused to a considerable degree by the increase of hard paving, it is surely not a good idea to be adding to the problem. The alternative site is also not satisfactory as it would bring construction disturbance close to the Buckhold Road flats. We suggest therefore that the empty industrial site, just to the north in Buckhold Road, opposite of the corner of KG Park, would be a better option than either of the chosen sites. ... continues page 7

A reinvigorated WEF for 2011

Wandsworth Environment Forum

At the most recent WEF meeting (9 December 2010), those present discussed once again the question of how to make the Forum a more active and effective umbrella group for the growing number of local organizations and individuals concerned with environmental matters in Wandsworth. We felt that public awareness of WEF is too low; we are not sufficiently active; and it is unfair to leave all follow-up action between meetings to the Chair. At the same time, we were convinced that WEF continues to have a valuable role as an avenue for two-way environmental dialogue between the local community and the Council, and as a recognised member of the Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership (WLSP).

We discussed a detailed proposal to reinvigorate WEF for 2011. We agreed to experiment for a year with a new way of working, reviewing its success or otherwise at the end of that period. To set this process in train, six WEF members, including Denny Gray (the Chair) and Vicki Carroll (the previous Chair), were asked to meet and action the following proposals. This meeting took place on 5 January 2011.

In future, WEF will have a Steering Group which will meet every 6 weeks, the first meeting being in February. It will comprise a named representative from each amenity society and other local groups

with a major environmental concern, as well as co-opted individuals prepared to share in the work of making WEF a more effective body. The WEF website will be updated and made more interesting. We will start a forum on the Web for the exchange of information and views among everyone who wants to get involved. An open meeting, on a specific topic or event or debate, will be organised every 3 or 4 months which all organizations and individual Wandsworth residents will be welcome to attend. Much closer liaison will be set up between WEF and its participating organizations, including notably the amenity societies, and between WEF and the Council. WEF, in conjunction with all its participating groups and individuals, during the coming year will pursue its already existing engagement with the Council over the question of reducing the general speed limit on local roads to 20mph. And its Steering Group, once constituted, may decide to prioritise other key environmental issues that WEF participants feel strongly about. The Steering Group intends to ask volunteers to fill particular roles, including – Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Website management, and Liaison Officer.

... the saving of the Thames

c) Jew's Row The preferred site is again an important industry for Wandsworth. It is a protected working wharf. Should the wharf cease to function for two or more years it is unlikely to be brought back into use afterwards. Alternative Site 2 is also unacceptable for all the reasons given in the TW leaflet. Generally, we consider intrusion onto the Thames foreshore to be undesirable but we feel that Alternative Site 1 would be the best option here. It is suggested that it would put the workings closer to the residential development and The Ship pub, but the plan of works shows the preferred site taking over the pub garden and the open square in front of the flats, so there is little to choose between the sites in this respect. We think Site 1 is also less likely to disturb the car workshop under the bridge arches. Traffic congestion is likely to be a serious problem in this area. The roundabout, Swandon Way, and the bridge are often very crowded.

In conclusion, we believe means must be found to remove the 80% of the sewage presently in the Thames that the tunnel cannot address because it does not come from the CSOs.

The Jacob Babbie Report ends by saying:

The need for significant sewerage infrastructure investment to deliver a low level of perceived qualitative benefit and to remove a low percentage of the total litter is therefore open to challenge.

We fully endorse their conclusion.

