

Forest Hill Society - Chair's Report

October 2007- October 2008

Chair: Michael Abrahams

Transport:

Our biggest successes of 2008 have clearly been on trains.

At the last AGM it looked like Network Rail would recommend a reduction in services to London Bridge when the East London Line trains started coming to Honor Oak Park and Forest Hill. Earlier this year we learnt that the final Route Utilisation Strategy had listened to many of the points made by the Forest Hill Society and as a result in the next 18 months we shall see peak services of not just 10 East London Line trains going to Canada Water and East London, and our existing services of 6 trains to London Bridge, but also 2 trains going directly to Clapham and Victoria at peak times. This is a significant enhancement on our current services.

We have pressed for a continuation of direct services to/from Charing Cross, off-peak at evenings and weekends, and we would like to see some off-peak and weekend services going directly to Gatwick and Brighton.

In July we saw the installation of ticket barriers at Forest Hill station and the closure of the gate on the Perry Vale exit outside peak times. We lobbied hard on this issue and as a result Jim Dowd MP spoke in parliament, Forest Hill ward councillors proposed a motion in council which was passed, and Mayor Sir Steve Bullock met with the managing directors of Southern Rail and London Rail at Forest Hill and Sydenham stations. As a result by the end of July the gate was open 24 hours a day.

Southern Rail are now planning to put ticket barriers at the bottom of the steps at the Perry Vale exit although the Forest Hill Society have recommended that a new exit is opened in Perry Vale car park, a plan that is supported by Lewisham council.

Pools:

One of the most important issues in Forest Hill over the last year has been the council's plans for redeveloping the pools. Early in 2008 the council made it clear that the pools could not be refurbished at anything like a reasonable cost and that a new swimming and leisure facility would be preferable. The council developed three options which involved the demolition of Louise House and the pools buildings and a new development incorporating swimming, leisure and new housing to help fund the development.

Throughout the discussions the Forest Hill Society have fought to bring swimming back to Forest Hill at the earliest possible opportunity. We accepted the council's conclusion that the pools could not be refurbished but we did ask that they consider a range of options including keeping the frontage of the pools – an option that they did not develop. At our general meeting in May we invited council officers along to talk about the issues in redeveloping the site and to listen to the views of local

residents. We made sure a public consultation took place, not just with our members, but with the whole community as had happened in the last consultation in 2006. We pressed for another public meeting as part of the consultation process and the council eventually agreed to a meeting on 21st August.

The entire consultation process was done begrudgingly and poorly conducted and resulting in 600 responses (compared to over 2,300 responses to the consultation in 2005). The Forest Hill Society, in the official response from the executive committee to the consultation favoured options 2 or 3, both of which had two pools. This matched the majority of views of individuals who responded, swimming user groups, local young people who were surveyed separately, Forest Hill Ward Councillors, and the head teachers of both Forest Hill School (Dacres Road) and Holy Trinity (Dartmouth Road)¹. Although we recognise that many other people in the local community have other opinions I believe that our submission did coincide with the majority opinion within the membership of the Society and the wider community.

On 20th August we learnt that Louise House had been listed by English Heritage after a request from a local resident. This meant that all three options are no longer possible, and the last year developing plans and positions on the redevelopment of the pools had been a waste of time. Early next year the council officers will report to the mayor and cabinet on the results of the feasibility study they are currently undertaking, to consider what use can be made of Louise House, and ways to bring swimming back on the site. Importantly the mayor has asked them to consider options that include the retention of the pools frontage as well as options that result in its demolition. I am pleased that the council is finally willing to consider both options and hope that they will be considered fairly so that we can have the best possible swimming facilities which may, or may not, include the retention of the pools frontage.

The Forest Hill Society have recommended that, after the feasibility study, the council look at a **public competition** as the best way to design a good building for the site. This should provide not just the right leisure facilities, but a building that is in harmony with the library and Louise House and will attract people to the building to use it.

During the last year it has been sad to see rival factions develop within the local community, with people across Forest Hill having very different opinions on development options. The last thing that the Forest Hill Society want to do is to see these divisions within the local community and we have been working with the Sydenham Society and other stakeholders to minimise these differences. I hope that when we get the results of the feasibility studies we can work together to bring swimming back to Forest Hill at the earliest possible opportunity. I believe that if we fail to do this we may not see swimming return to Forest Hill and the effects on the local high street and peoples' health would be devastating.

¹ <http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7E947910-CD1B-4EE2-B9B1-9DDED6351D18/0/08e6337862c1474882c91e5a96546001Item11ForestHillPoolsAppendixA17September2008.PDF> paragraphs A4.3-A4.4

Planning:

There have been a number of planning applications over the last year that the Forest Hill Society has had to consider. Rather than going through them in details I will summarise them briefly:

Location	Forest Hill Society Position	Lewisham council decision	Other notes
Tyson Road	Opposed	Rejected	Developer's appeal withdrawn
Westwood Park	Opposed	Rejected	
Forest Hill Central (Perry Vale)	Opposed	Rejected	Berkeley Homes appeal being considered
Tewkesbury Avenue	Not submitted but opposed	Accepted	Going to judicial review
McDonalds site	Opposed	Accepted	Forest Hill conservation area
23-27 London Road	Opposed	Accepted	(Beside Capitol and behind shops)
Manor Mount	Opposed	One accepted Second Awaiting decision	Forest Hill conservation area
Redberry Grove	Opposed	Awaiting decision	Sydenham Park conservation area
Ticket Barriers on Perry Vale	Opposed	Awaiting decision	
11 Perry Vale	Opposed	Awaiting decision	

FHS Events:

In the last year we have continued to run some very successful and varied events. At last year's AGM we heard from Jeff Lowe, who talked about Havelock Walk and the need to improve the signage and shop fronts in the town centre. We had an excellent talk later in the year given by Steve Grindlay where we packed out the top floor of the Hob with over 120 people – a fantastic turn out for a talk about local history.

We got outside for a walk from Wells Park to One Tree Hill and a visit to Garthorne Road nature reserve. Both walks gave members a chance to appreciate the green spaces around Forest Hill which we are very lucky to have. We set up a stall for Blythe Hill Fun Day on a lovely summer's day and spoke to lots of local people about the work of the Society.

Finally we set up the 23 Club which has been running since May. Some members have become regulars at this monthly dinning club, while others have come along for just one or two. Everybody is more than welcome to join us in our support for local restaurants and a chance to chat with others about Forest Hill or anything else.

Committee Members:

It has been a privilege to be the first chair of the Forest Hill Society but it would have been an impossible task without the dedication of so many of the committee and people who have assisted with the delivering of newsletters. My thanks to everybody who has shown their commitment in so many ways to the Forest Hill Society.