



## Council to face Public Inquiry

The Secretary of State for Transport has decided that the Southend Borough Council's controversial plan to "dual" Priory Crescent, thereby destroying about 130 mature trees and concreting over an ancient Public Open Space, will have to run the gauntlet of a Public Inquiry.

The Council's plans, the details of which came under scrutiny by the Public and local businesses when the Council issued Compulsory Purchase Orders in early May, were subject to many letters of protest, not just on environmental grounds, but also on grounds of road safety. The Borough has been reeling under a series of fatalities on its dual carriageways since the beginning of the year and adding yet more dual carriageway through a residential area while at the same time reducing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists flies in the face of Government policy.

The Council's own claims concerning a reduction in journey times were also looking less and less credible as local businesses campaign for extra sets of traffic signals to allow their customers access to their premises.

Peter Walker, Chairman of the Priory Park Preservation Society, commented: "This Public Inquiry is great news. At long last the Council will have to stop pretending that opposition to this road does not exist and the realities of their plan will come under proper scrutiny."

The latest on the Public Inquiry is that it will be held in either February or March next year. In a nutshell there are two

sorts of objectors: statutory and non-statutory. The statutory objectors are, to the best of our knowledge, ARC Car Wash, Aldi Supermarkets and Lookers Cars, whose land is subject to the compulsory purchase orders. The non-statutory objectors are all the members of the public who wrote to protest about the scheme.

The problem here is that if SBC can persuade the statutory objectors to withdraw their opposition to the scheme, the Public Inquiry may not go ahead. However, the Secretary of State has the discretion to enforce an inquiry in any case. It is therefore essential that all PPPS members should write in strong terms to Alistair Darling indicating their reasons for continuing to oppose the scheme in order to persuade him of the strength of feeling locally. Please persuade any non-member acquaintances to write as well.

The addresses to write to are:-

Alistair Darling MP, Edinburgh Central Constituency Office, 15a Stafford Street, Edinburgh. EH3 7BU

Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Transport, House of Commons, London. SW1A0AA

Secretary of State for Transport, Government Office for the NE, Local Authority Orders Section, Welbar House, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE1 4TD

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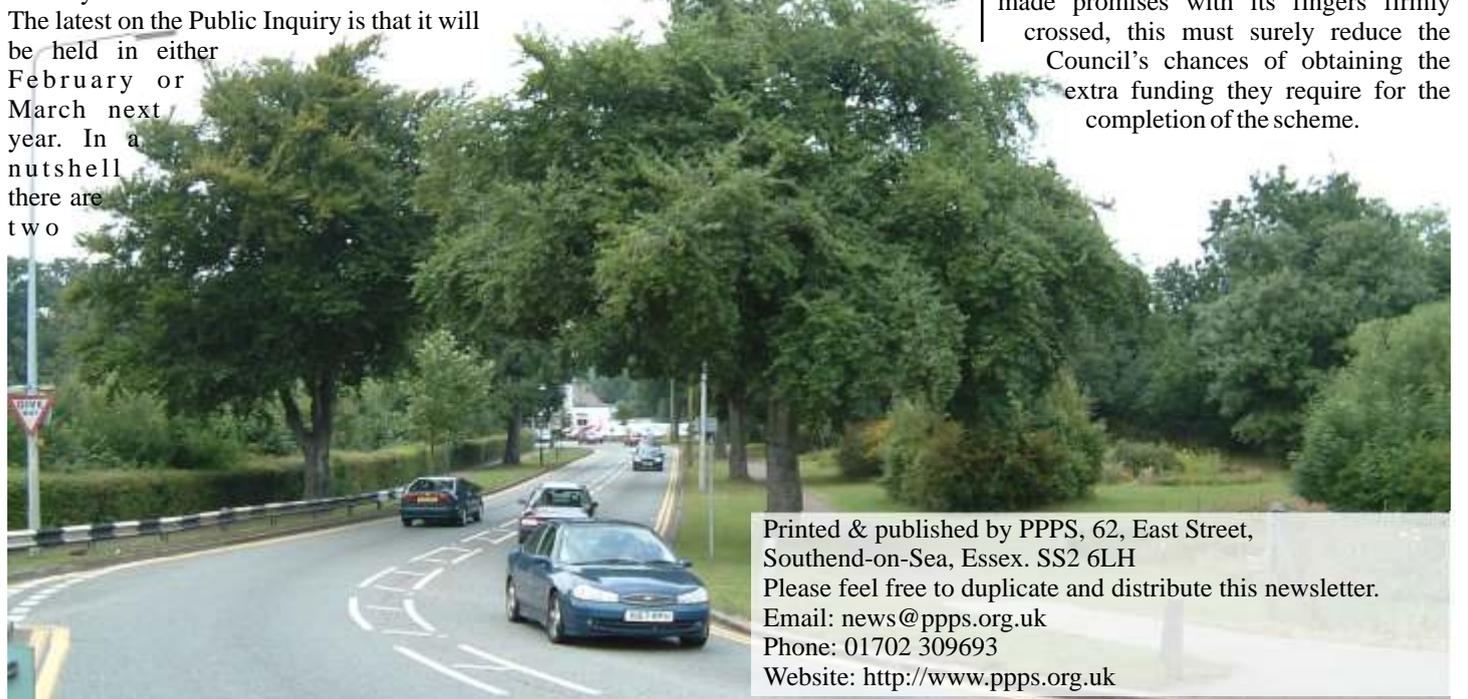
The Southend Borough Council's 3rd Annual Progress Report on their Local Transport Plan has made it plain that the Bus Station, also known as a "Travel Centre", originally an integral part of the Plan, will be scrapped unless Central Government agree to the SBC's demand for further funds to support their controversial plan to make Priory Crescent dual carriageway.

Faced with spiralling costs relating to the Priory Crescent scheme, the Progress Report states:-

**"Further progress in taking forward the Travel Centre element of the Major Scheme cannot be made without the allocation of additional resources, as requested by the Borough Council in its 2nd Annual Progress Report."**

This is a breathtaking admission by the Borough Council. The key reason given by the SBC for the widening of Priory Crescent is the Town's ever-worsening traffic problem but the one part of the Scheme which could go some way towards reducing traffic is the bus station. This report makes it crystal clear that this is the Council's lowest priority.

What is more, the funds were originally allocated by Central Government because the Local Transport Plan was Integrated, the bus station being an essential part. When Whitehall finds out that the Council made promises with its fingers firmly crossed, this must surely reduce the Council's chances of obtaining the extra funding they require for the completion of the scheme.



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# Chairman's Report to AGM

*by Peter Walker*

The PPPS's second year in existence has been no less active than the first. The first problem to be overcome was an extremely difficult first Committee Meeting after last year's AGM. This broke up after about 90 minutes after it became clear that it was impossible for the remainder of the Committee to work with the elected Fund Raising Officer, Chris Ford. Sadly, subsequent discussions amongst the other Committee Members led to the conclusion that if the Committee was to carry out its functions to the best of our collective abilities then we would have to continue without Mr and Mrs Ford, the latter having been elected as Secretary at last year's AGM.

Our application to the Bar Pro Bono unit proved successful and a hearing was granted with a barrister, James Maurici. Michael Downer and Alex Bunn met him on 19th June and on the same day collected the PPPS file from Dawson's Solicitors in Lincoln's Inn. Subsequent to the meeting with Mr. Maurici, we accepted his recommendation that we transfer our business to Richard Buxton Solicitors, Cambridge. His approach is markedly different from that of Gerald Moran of Dawson: whereas Moran was most accessible and ready to write to the Council at a moment's notice, Buxton prefers to keep a watching brief and to intervene at the appropriate moments. One such moment came in March this year when he was confident that we had grounds to challenge in court the Secretary of State's decision that the Council's appropriation process did not need an Environmental Impact Assessment. Despite our best efforts, it was decided not to pursue this because there was too poor a response from the membership to our appeal for further funds. Although Richard Buxton has been highly recommended to us from a number of sources, we have had considerable difficulty at times in making contact with him.

One member who did far more than any other to raise funds for the Society was Janet Gormley, whose sky-dive raised well over £400 to the cause. This was a brilliant effort.

The true extent of the Council's attitude towards an open and honest debate of the issues relating to Priory Park came later in the Summer when Keith and Sue Richardson, who with five other PPPS members stood as Independent Candidates in the May election, were forced to appear in the High Court to defend themselves against charges relating to the Representation of the Peoples Act (some of their literature did not bear the obligatory Printer's Name & Address). The two Council representatives who were responsible for the prolonging of their ordeal were Roger Weaver and his wife Verina Wilson, insisting that a court hearing take place even though they were unable to present any evidence. At approximately the same time I learned that I was being investigated by the Police for my part in the election 2002 and a three-month dialogue with a detective constable culminated in me presenting myself for interview at Brentwood Police Station on 9th September. This procedure was only terminated after I sent a strongly worded complaint that the Crown Prosecution Service was not equitable in the application of its Code of Practice. Subsequent complaints to the Ombudsman and the Standards Board for England are ongoing. To give credit where it is due, Chris Ford has pursued Mr. and Mrs. Weaver with a remarkable tenacity and after an alleged incident involving an electoral placard at about 1 a.m. on 1st there, are outstanding allegations against Mr. Weaver which are currently being investigated by the Police. This was published in Private Eye, as well as on the front page of the Evening Echo, and can be seen on the PPPS website.

Meanwhile, it became known that the cost of the road scheme had more than doubled, as the Council had suddenly realised that if they wanted their new road to go over the railway they would have to build a bridge. They set the wheels in motion to appropriate the land known as The Shrubbery and this process was completed on 14th November, despite overwhelming public opposition. At this self-same meeting Roger Weaver announced to the World that there had been a serious land-slip on the sea front at Westcliff. The PPPS were quick to make the link between this land slip and the removal of the 26 mature trees in Prittlewell Square. Trees remove water from the soil, these trees were removed in May 2002, and according to information obtained from English Nature and the Essex Water Company, a build-up of up to 1000 tonnes of water could have accumulated in the soil during this time. We then made the connection between tree removal and landslips along Priory Crescent, where there is a relatively deep cutting very close to the site where the Council are intent upon removing 120 mature oak and beech. Railtrack were informed and their engineer made contact with the Council. We are convinced that this will have added a considerable but unspecified sum to the Council's costs as their new road is due to run along the edge of the cutting, a Victorian structure which will require considerable strengthening if it is to support

the Euro-juggernauts which are intended to use the road.

It needs to be borne in mind that the Council's plan F5 is part of an overall Integrated Transport Policy and that this policy was originally to have been fully funded by central government. The Council have been aware for a year that they needed more funds and, via the Transport Team at GO-East, they requested a further £4.8 million. Despite a series of meetings in December and January, that funding is still not forthcoming, quite probably because PPPS and Parklife were very active in refuting the Council's arguments on virtually all grounds. PPPS submitted a 36-page report to the Sec of State, copies of which may be seen at this meeting (if you would like to take a copy away with you a £10 donation to PPPS funds will secure...). Repeated telephone calls to John Brown (GO-East) indicate that the Council's funding is still not forthcoming.

Meanwhile, undaunted, the Council issued Compulsory Purchase Orders on land currently belonging to Morley Fund Management (aka Norwich Union), Lookers Cars, the ARC Car Wash and the Aldi Supermarket. The first of these is in favour of the Council's scheme whereas the other three will be opposing it. The PPPS is liaising with the last three companies and making available to their legal teams the information we have gathered during the past two years.

So far is the future is concerned, it seems probable that there will be a Public Enquiry as the CPOs are to be contested. It is our hope and intention that if this comes about then the entire scheme should be looked at and not just the Compulsory Purchase aspects of it. If we are to be represented at any future Public Enquiry, then our fund raising will have to be a great deal more effective than it has been to date: those members who have taken advantage of the opportunity to keep the PPPS solvent through donations and standing orders have done a magnificent job.

# Treasurer's Report to AGM

*by Michael Downer*

Owing to pressure of business Joe Shields resigned as treasurer of the society after giving sterling service, at the beginning of October 2002. I was made an offer which I should have refused, to act as treasurer. Owing to the labyrinthine procedure involved in this simple transfer at HSBC bank, I only received a statement directly from them at the beginning of March. I have just managed (I hope) to make the bank's figures agree with mine.

Balance at 3/10/02	£3270.63
Balance at 27/5/03	£2220.20
Money received as donations during above period	£726.53
Money received as Standing orders in above period	£669
Bank interest	£1.36
Outgoings between 3/10/02 and 27/5/03	
Solicitors fees	£2000
Temple Sutton Primary School for printing	£365
Stamps on circulars to members	£35.11
1 bad cheque	£24
Cheques and cash still to be paid into bank	£57
Stamp costs still to be recovered	£61.60

No bill has been received from Peter Walker for the costs involved in producing his report to GO-East and in many other undertakings.

It is only the generous donations of a small number of members and the ongoing commitment of the twenty two who have signed mandates for Standing Orders that have enabled us to continue the fight. Many members having given their initial members fee, continue to believe that solicitors, The Royal Mail, etc. should give their services free and that there is no need for further contributions.

Standing orders from all our members for a small monthly amount would make an enormous difference to our fighting fund.

For full minutes of the AGM, latest news and background information, please visit the website:

<http://www.ppps.org.uk/>