

# THIS, a town centre for Finsbury Park? *You cannot be serious!*

THE current proposal is so flawed that it is hard to know where to start, so I'm afraid this is going to be a collection of jottings about which I hope that, even at this late juncture, the planners may yet take note.

I have already made some comments on the centre-piece of the plans, the proposal for flats on the Rowan's site. Throwing up of blocks of flats on the Rowan's site is one of least desirable things that planners could allow, as I hope to demonstrate.

A big chunk of residents by this key transport node will create a constituency of nimbys who would likely object, frustrate or stop further change or improvement in the area. Housing is needed but it needs to be further away from this *key transport node*.

There is little point in the planners talking about permeability to the park unless they address east/ west permeability through/ over/ under the station.

## A transport interchange

THIS IS primarily a *transport interchange* about movement of people so let us have the statistics of what that movement is going to be and how the **arrival of Thameslink** will affect it (peak hour traffic to- and from- Highbury and Islington will be horrendous, making Finsbury Park Town Centre *less* desirable). Just another point is **cycle routes**: why are they not shown?

One of the main ones goes down Finsbury Park Road – but that is not considered relevant to the development area.

Is the artist's impression part of proposing to abolish the East Bus terminus and put all the bus stops onto Seven Sisters Road increasing the walk distance from train – again making the interchange less not more efficient?

## Ticket gates

THE **ticket gates** will stop people walking through the station between the two bus stations.

It is suggested that this inconveniences few and that the distance to walk is less via Stroud Green Road than through the foot tunnels. This depends on which bus you are

catching and where you are dropped off at the terminals – some bus stops are not in the East Terminus but on Seven Sisters Road).

There is some disingenuity here. The rail may go north south but the east west routes deserve proper consideration.

Elsewhere they describe walking under the bridges as unpleasant to be avoided so a route through the station might be desirable can't have it both ways. To make transport interchanges work better they should interconnect *more* and that includes making bus station to bus station access better.

Schemes that reduce amenity for bus users have been around for a long time. There are enough rail arches/ is sufficient space there to provide an independent walk through, although not a right of way obviously.

## Footfall

IF ISLINGTON and Haringey want more of a sense of place and seamless integration of commercial Stroud Green Road with commercial Seven Sisters Road and Blackstock Road then the 'key' is *not* footfall to Rowans.

If this was a footfall issue, we would be talking about Arsenal Football Club match day attendances and how pressure on the Tube system could be relieved if there were more things to do and see before and after games. (Holloway Road Tube station has to close during matches because the area regeneration proposals did not stretch to upgrading that station).

Games are no longer solely a Saturday afternoon issue and the ground capacity at Emirates – at a nominal 60,000 – is 20,000 (= over 50%) higher than Highbury's former 38,000. Should we be turning the area more into a hospitality zone – especially if Haringey want more events in the park?

Talking of which, any comment on the all-day drinking behaviour of the Stone Roses fans this summer?

The most broken glass on the road since the Riot after Arsenal won the double and a bus and some cars were trashed (and the police withdrew because they were taken totally unaware and under-resourced?).

## The Champs Élyssé

IT IS curious to suggest a formal *des Champs Élyssé* through from Station Place to Finsbury Park, when Park management (for years) has been to discourage people from staying in/ using the area nearest the Seven Sisters Road entrance.

This discouragement takes the simple form of no seats in the near vicinity for those that might want a few moments rest between travel journeys.

(The snide comment on the numbers of seats in the East Bus Station is noted. How many *amenity* as opposed to *Bus Shelter* seats are there on the West side?).

The Park has benefitted from Lottery funds to replace planting etc but the Seven Sisters Road Entrance is still unremarkable. (The Manor House entrance to the Park is often covered in protest banners, why? What is management up to?)

### **May one suggest that there are no seats in the park entrance for the following reasons:**

- 1) to discourage alcoholics congregating putting off potential visitors
- 2) to discourage people supposedly dog walking sitting there and their trophy dogs putting off potential visitors  
  
(have you seen owners training their dogs to attack saplings in the park, stripping the trees of their bark?  
(the dogs of course retain their bark and need to be persuaded not to dump in the park entrance too)
- 3) to stop people sleeping on park benches (homeless)
- 4) to stop people loitering near the pay per visit toilets (perverts)
- 5) to stop people loitering near the children's play group areas (stranger danger)

Will building posh flats change this? What will future Park management policy be? We should be told!

### **Do the new proposals:**

- 1) remove the play group / garden / playground facility? If so why? To be replaced where? In a south facing not east facing location? Near the tennis courts in winter maybe?
- 2) make it easier for parents with children to use park benching (and access toilets / nappy change) near this playgroup area?
- 3) increase the number of toilets generally for a popular park?
- 4) stop local supermarkets selling cheap booze to alcoholics?
- 5) take any account of the number of methadone users who use the chemist opposite for their (daily) fixes?
- 6) answer the public safety issues / public fears regarding local stabbings (going back to the Zito case)?

Highbury police station has closed for conversion to flats: Is the 'new' Blackstock Road shop unit an effective replacement?

## Retail and commerce

TO MAKE more of a sense of place, the arches under the station need to be opened up to encourage movement (footfall) between the east and west commercial areas.

The Arsenal Shop might have to give way.

Arsenal could buy Rowans as their own 'Nike Town', show an interest in developing park facilities, they have millions to play with/ support the community life.

People travel to **Fonthill Road Fashion Shops** from far and wide (even from south London): how could this vibrancy be used to make the wider area more commercially viable?

Some kind of rival to Petticoat Lane or Camden Market?

### **Where is the planners' vision?**

That part of Blackstock Road, known as Highbury Vale has secondary shopping on both sides of the road, so please show this on maps.

Highbury Vale was known once upon time, in retail terms as the local 'Bond Street'. Where is the vision in the plan for Finsbury Park to be regenerated from the south?

The T Bird Drapers's shop was once commercially successful, but is now a wine bar.

The area can still not sustain a fishmongers (nearest Nag's Head Market, Highbury Barn, Stroud Green Road, near Tesco).

What indices/ benchmarks will they be using to demonstrate success? We should be told. Are any of them based on socio economic class presumptions or prejudices?

## Cash back?

OR IS this all about Haringey getting planning gain money for some flats on the very edge of its borough?

Finsbury Park does have its charity shops, pound stores, pawn shops and pay day lenders: what exactly was being sold in the artist's impression market stalls?

Why are there no proposal regarding alternative use of the British Transport Police site?

(What is BTP's role in preventing stabbings at bus stops under the SSR Bridge?).

## Evening Standard article (last night: 22/08/2013)

*Stone Roses concerts blamed for huge crime rise in Finsbury Park* – is self explanatory – and ties in with other points raised here (see attachment).

Finsbury Park concerts are now associated with crime. How useful is the Blackstock Road Police (Shop Unit) for these events?

(Or the British Transport Police office for that matter?).

Councillors (incl Paul Convery, Islington? What does he think of the Town Square idea?) claimed officials *failed to anticipate the scale of the disorder* (from more than 30,000 people).

*Once again a Town Centre concept is not about footfall to Rowans.*

The point about the 2,500 objections to more Emirates concerts (never mind Finsbury Park ones) is that many concertgoers arrive / depart through Finsbury Park station.

There can be little doubt most Stone Roses fans (= over 50% ?) were seriously inebriated before the shows started (the most wasted the group had ever seen).

'A dispersal zone was in place'. Any Town Plan for Finsbury Park has to show dispersal zones *on the map*.

Should / shall there be more toilets?

Park was 'sticky for weeks' – play there with your toddlers anyone? (Even the dog walkers complained of the underfoot conditions!)

Should the artist's impressions now include a *piss* artist's impression. Who is taking the piss?

## Piss alley

THE **Block of Flats** proposals features a new **piss alley** to the park which looks more and more like a holding pen for 'kettle-ing' concert goers / departers.

Would councillors propose living over a public urinal? Should we be kettle-ing people?

Haringey makes money from gigs in the park. Where is the benefit for Islington + Hackney locals??

Currently at the Seven Sisters Entrance there is a fun fair dominating the view. Do you know you can not even see a park bench from the entrance?

Can't see a circus bench or a pop concert bench to sit on either.

Poor people are often described as not having a pot to piss in; the park entrance does not have a bench to sit in (but is a great place to piss apparently).

ES does not mention if men or women are the biggest offenders in this (Stone Roses) matter. Wee should be told.

The park (and a sane town centre) is for all ages groups (at all times?).

Especially ones too young to vote or too old or poor to afford pop tickets or to get pissed in public. Any Town Plan has to show how it manages big events involving non-locals.

Window dressing images of some cosy (provincial rural idyll looking Farmer's) market do not represent the reality of a hard-working urban environment that regularly has high participation metropolitan entertainment events (with which it struggles to deal).

## Town Centre Planning

**To present a Town Plan as merely about street frontages misses the point.** Town centres are about commercial activity: this means people movement and footfall.

The Finsbury Park area needs to be looked at, not in a linear sense of the main roads only, but in terms of people flows, the existing aspects that promote and those that inhibit these flows.

It is difficult to create a tranquil and bustling space next to a Red Route (Seven Sisters Road).

(Any one looked at Windrush Square in Brixton: is it animated in the classic way we associate with Italian plazas or is it just a joyless open space that might only be used for tub-thumping rallies/ public speaking events?).

## Red-route alert

NON-RED route sites have to be designed properly too: any one looked at the Town Square in Walthamstow? The junction of High Street and Hoe Street – this triangular space is just a wide pavement. The animation is in High Street street market only.

Town squares have the characteristic of enclosure and for the most part (at ground level) human scale

To be human scale you might argue that you should probably be able to walk across the shortest dimension of a square in, say, less than a minute.

The space occupied by City North/United House and faced by Wells Terrace could be reconfigured (under a long term plan) to make a great square unmolested by the red route (and complement the bustle of Fonthill road).

(It would however reduce large scale local business premises –mare they big employers though?).

Why did not Islington propose the N4 Library site on Blackstock Road as a Town Square?

Why are Islington supporting this proposal for flats in Haringey?

## First and foremost, Finsbury Park is a transport interchange

TOWN planning needs to consider Finsbury Park first and foremost as a *transport interchange*. Interchanges work best when all modes are close to each other so the time taken transferring between two modes is minimized / optimised.

The most use of the rail is *through traffic* but the bus stations are the *feeders* for commuting locals that live nearby and who support local businesses, on those days when there are no football matches or concerts in the park.

### **Destroying the East Bus station would be a big step backwards.**

The *cycle park* is an initiative to make Finsbury Park more accessible for local commuters. Using bikes to get to the station reduces kiss and ride motorists (who slow traffic at peak times) and is therefore good for pedestrian and traffic flow (and healthier too). Where has the cycle park gone from the artists impression?

*Removal or placing the cycle park at a greater distance is regressive.*

Similarly, for those disabled or otherwise unable to use buses, the Taxi is very important in their lives. Taxi drop off + pick up has to be as close as possible to station entrance.

It is disgraceful that the artist impression appears to have deleted the Taxi rank – this is so regressive (typical of one dimensional where's-my-profit developers' thinking). Is it not disgraceful that Islington appears to be supporting this?

## Step-free access and pedestrians

LINKED to this is the need for step-free access street to platform for the rail and tube services. Finsbury Park and Arsenal are among the very few deep level tube stations with no lift or escalator access.

Stairs-only access make Finsbury Park unfriendly to visitors. People travel from King's Cross to Angel and then catch a bus to Finsbury Park because it is easier for them to carry their luggage that way.

Retail at Finsbury Park suffers because of lack of step free access. Why is Finsbury Park not a (higher) TfL priority for escalators or lifts?

Revenue loss between Heavy Rail and Tube has been an issue and turnstile gates are being included at last at Finsbury Park station. However this entails stopping bus station to bus station users transferring via the foot tunnels.

This is *regressive*: it might meet the needs of TfL/ Network Rail revenue protection but it reduces the amenity for locals.

Everyone agrees that walking under the still-pigeon-infested bridges on Seven Sisters Road and Stroud Green Road is miserable.

TfL/NR benefits from mass attendance at sports and park events: why are they making life more difficult for locals (at all times)?

## The key concept

*The key to any concept of 'Town Centre Finsbury Park' is the station and improving East /West permeability.*

Opening up Station Place to the Public Park is quite literally a side issue (for reasons previously discussed).

The railway arches under the rail viaduct could be opened up to encourage people movement: the ambience of these tunnels could match that at London Bridge?

The more people movement there is the more retail opportunity, the more self-policing surveillance goes on.

The poor management of *Stone Roses* type events makes the Town Centre unattractive and makes it a no-go area in people's mind for not just concert days but other days too.

Lots of people avoid shopping locally on match days. Let us see the 'dispersal zones' (for 30,000 people) *on the Maps*.

Let us see some benchmarking against the measures Brent Council took in preparation for/ response to the new Wembley Stadium (not all favourable/progressive).

People-friendly initiatives are taking place: pavements have been widened to assist pedestrians going to/from the Emirates.

Cycle Routes are being taken off the main roads through side streets – but they should be recognised as part of the hierarchy of spaces and uses that contribute to a balanced and well-thought-out town centre. Let us see them *on Maps*.

*Successful town squares* are often one-street back from a 'red route' thoroughfare (looked at Christopher Place in relationship to Oxford Street?).

Finsbury Park Station is a significant asset on London's transport infrastructure (and a no-brainer missed opportunity for more commercial development): how many places in Zone two are so well served? (None, probably, including Islington's favourite, Upper Street)

Finsbury Park can support commercial activity in the form of office blocks. Workplaces, retail and social/leisure activities *should be close to the station*.



## Housing

HOUSING, should be slightly further away so as not to be disturbed by trading. People also work shifts so bedrooms should be further away from noisy rail lines.

It is noted that this block of flats is being promoted at the same time that house-owners in local streets are refused dormer windows to do loft conversions – an increase of housing density within walking distance of the station (or one or two bus stops) that would be sustainable.

(The local area is not a conservation area, dormers do not overlook the way high rise flats do – compare issues with those for redeveloping Camden Town.)

Finsbury Park Station as a prime location could justify over site development, raising commercial activity density to finance escalators etc ).

Putting denser housing closer to a remote outer suburban station might be justified because reduced footfall means there is less scope for commerce (yes this can be a circular argument).

Not for nothing does the Square Mile discourage housing because it becomes an obstacle to commercial redevelopment/ economic activity.

Finsbury Park is so well connected to the transport system it should be a work destination: London plc has to use/sweat its assets if it is to provide employment (compete locally and globally).

We note that along (the Islington side of) Blackstock Road in recent years, the Pickfords Depository and the Petrol Station sites that once provided employment were converted to housing (and one of them shock-horror a gated community) not even work-live units. Unless local kids grow up seeing (small) scale business around them, what ambitions will they have?

**Also we should be encouraging people to work locally and not commute long distances? What are the Islington Planners thinking of?**

Converting Rowans to housing is another (shameful) dumbing down of the area's potential. This is not leafy suburbia, it should be bustling city-life-driven commerce.

This looks like a plan by Islington to *reduce* the potential of Finsbury Park.

Housing this close to Finsbury Park is not ideal and the long term potential for Nimbyism is a conflict to be avoided.

## Thameslink

WHEN Finsbury Park gets Thameslink services (2018?) more transfers between trains will happen.

At present at rush hour often the only way locals can get onto a Victoria (or Piccadilly) line train is because of the transfers taking place.

Often locals have to wait several trains before they can board, never mind get a seat. This will get worse when Thameslink (otherwise very welcome) arrives.

In the event of major incidents at King's Cross, it is Finsbury Park that is used to de-train passengers, so Finsbury Park has many strategic purposes.

People using Thameslink may well want to transfer to the London Overground at Highbury and Islington to reach Docklands.

## Overground

ALREADY this stretch of Victoria Tube line is at capacity. How long before the idea of a London Overground branch to Finsbury Park is revisited?

Where would such platforms (no) go? And what objections would these newly arrived flat owners then raise?

Maybe a London Overground branch would / could not terminate at Finsbury Park and would need to go on to Alexandra Palace (to connect with Crossrail 2?)

**Any Finsbury Park Town Plan proposal has to look at the strategic future of Finsbury Park as a major London asset.**

Key urban sites (adjacent major transport hubs) should be active revenue generating: not passive housing. *The closer to mass footfall a site is, the more commercial it should be.*

If commuters/ employers/ planners of all three boroughs saw Finsbury Park as a destination, the potential for economic growth would be great because so many people can access the station.

Turning prime sites next to the likes of Finsbury Park into sleepy housing is an abomination and is denying future work opportunities to the local economy.

**This would be a seriously regressive, backwards step that is not easily reversed and will compromise future progressive ideas. These half-baked plans are shockingly bad. Whether or not planners manage to force them through, the documents will stand as a monument to lack of vision and a text book case as to how *not* to do town planning.**

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