

ETCASG Report on the Mini-Holland Scheme Meeting (Cycle Enfield)

Enfield Civic Centre, 30 July 2014

1. Background

1.1 A meeting, hosted by the Enfield Town Conservation Area Study Group (ETCASG), took place at the Civic Centre on 30 July 2014. Its purpose was to start a public discussion on the impact of the mini-Holland scheme (now named Cycle Enfield). The meeting's focus was solely Enfield Town Centre (the ET conservation area) but it was hoped that its ramifications would spread to affect the whole scheme.

1.2 ETCASG received a grant from the Enfield Society to engage the services of Ben Hamilton-Baillie (BHB), leading transport, traffic and urban design consultant, to visit Enfield Town Centre for a day and give a presentation in the evening. His scheme for Poynton, near Manchester, won the 2014 Urban Transport Street Design Award and he also worked on Exhibition Road and many other urban regeneration schemes both nationally and internationally. A short video called "Poynton Regenerated" is available (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vzDDMzq7d0)

1.3 The meeting was very well attended, mostly by Enfield Town residents and traders, but also by attendees from Palmers Green, Winchmore Hill, Southgate and Barnet. The local newspapers were present as were many councillors and council officers. The ETCASG Chairman introduced BHB and Martin Prescott, former Councillor, who had kindly agreed to chair the meeting. BHB gave a superb presentation which was followed by a lively question and answer session.

1.4 BHB's presentation addressed the concept of streetscape design, both in the UK and internationally. Although he only focused briefly on the specific problems of Enfield Town Centre in terms of street design, his whole presentation was pertinent to our town centre.

2. BHB Main points

2.1 Streets are important to social and economic well-being. They incorporate movement, display, commerce and social interaction. They must be considered public spaces, not just corridors for moving traffic. They are an important way of defining a town.

2.2 Over the last decade there have been changes which are leading to the town centre becoming redundant. With the rapid rise of out-of-town stores, online shopping and the use of social media, it is no longer necessary for people to have to visit the town centre to shop, interact or gather information. Instead people will only come if they choose to. If town centres are not inherently attractive with qualities people find desirable, they will die. The implications and practicalities of this are only just filtering through to local councils.

2.3 Currently most streets take a defined form - pavements with kerbs, roadways with a central white dividing line, street lights, signs and defined places to cross. Up to the 1960's the designated areas of movement, trade and social interaction were loosely defined. The Buchanan Report "*Traffic in Towns*" (1963) stated that these functions had incompatible requirements and recommended segregation between traffic and civic activity. This led to the development of pedestrian precincts and vertical segregation (e.g. overhead pedestrian walkways). For the last 50 years the government has enthusiastically encouraged traffic segregation and control through installation of more and more barriers, traffic lights, painted lines and signs.

2.4 In the last 10 years there has been a movement, particularly in the Netherlands and other parts of continental Europe, but also in forward-thinking parts of the UK (e.g. Kensington High Street), to remove barriers and guard rails. Although their removal has often been controversial, pedestrian injuries in these areas have shown a dramatic reduction. Just a few years ago, a government policy document "*Manual for Streets 1&2*" recognised for the first time streets as important spaces, not just corridors for movement, and the concept of "shared space" is beginning

to take root. The worry that borough engineers might be sued if accidents do occur has been alleviated as the courts have made it clear that designing in accordance with professional standards cannot be negligent. Exhibition Road (below) has been completely transformed and revitalised by turning it into "shared space" for all users.



2.5 Signs are a poor way to influence behaviour. In the absence of regulatory signs, social protocols kick in and all users of space respond to context. Both drivers and pedestrians adjust their behaviour through a learning process of co-ordination and anticipation. In particular children will only be safe if they are exposed to hazards and learn from them. Traffic lights are inherently dangerous as a green light encourages the driver to assume the middle of the street is dedicated solely to traffic movement and they effectively become blinkered to all other street users. Yellow lines can be removed by the use of restricted parking zones and clearly demonstrating spatially where parking is permitted.

2.6 Speed is the key and determines the relationship between traffic of every kind and pedestrians. The crucial question in Enfield Town Centre is not "*what speed limit should be imposed*" but "*what speed do we want the traffic to move through the town centre*". There is a natural relationship between evolutionary maximum running speed and safety. At 18-20 mph a pedestrian is able to respond to the surrounding traffic and although he might get hurt he is unlikely to die. The distribution curve for fatal accidents and traffic speed is very low and more or less flat up to approximately 20mph. Above this speed the curve rises exponentially fast and there is a dramatic increase in fatalities. In addition, at lower speeds a vehicle needs less space to manoeuvre so more public space is gained.

2.7 Major highways have completely different requirements to urban streets. BHB illustrated the contrasting quality of the two essential worlds.

The Highway	The Public Realm
Single purpose	Multi-purpose
Regulated by the state	Defined by social protocols
Impersonal	Personal
Linear – a corridor	Spatial – a room
Consistent	Constantly changing
Predictable	Ambiguous, uncertain, unpredictable
Systematic and standardised	Contextual and distinctive
Reliant on simple signs and markings	Employs all forms of human communication
Designed for high speed	Designed for low speeds and static activities

2.8 Major highways and motorways require wide lanes and heavy regulation as they are designed to allow traffic to move at high speed. Urban streets are completely different. They indicate the values of the town. They are effectively public spaces which are defined by cultural, personal, spatial and multi-purpose relationships that are constantly changing and evolving. The difficulty is where these collide and the highway meets the street. It would therefore be essential to understand and clearly mark the entry points into Enfield Town where currently there is little sense of arrival in the town centre. Points of arrival by all users are of fundamental importance, especially in front of stations which are key arrival points.

2.9 A number of examples were shown of innovative street re-design across Europe.

- A Dutch primary school playground in **Noordlaren** extends across a road in such a way that drivers are immediately made aware of the presence of the school.
- **Ashford** has removed its three-lane ring road and re-instated two way traffic, removing six sets of signals. It has deliberately created plazas and interesting spaces to engage drivers' attention to the contextual environment.
- **Hennef** in Germany, with a similar traffic volume to Enfield Town (9,000 vehicles a day), has installed a simple central median with lighting columns, visual narrowing and a strong sense of "edge friction" through the use of the tree canopy and activity along the carriageway edges, creating a low-speed high street that is easy to cross.
- "Skvallertorget" (Gossip Square) in **Norrköping**, Sweden is a busy and lively space on the edge of the University and town centre, coping with 13,500 vehicles a day. Traffic signals were removed, and a strong identity and place quality created through the paving and clear frame surrounding the space.
- **New Road, Brighton**, a cultural focal point, is now a very low-speed street, transformed by Brighton & Hove Council to generate much higher footfall and trading values.
- **Seven Dials** in central London introduced the concept of shared space over 25 years ago. Drivers, cyclists and pedestrians mix freely.
- **Poynton's** town centre, a major traffic junction, was very economically depressed although, like Enfield, it has a number of attractive buildings. Traffic volumes were, and remain, very high with 26,000 vehicles a day passing through including a large number of lorries. Approximately 50% of the shops were empty. By changing it to shared space with clearly defined points of entry it was transformed and within a year all shop units were in use. By reforming the junctions so that they were single lane but without traffic lights or regulated pedestrian crossings or barriers, the junctions became very efficient and queuing traffic has been reduced. Vehicles move slowly (16-17 mph) but freely. Pavement widths have increased significantly and pedestrians can and do cross the street, often obliquely, wherever they like. Drivers respond to the needs of children, the disabled and the elderly.

2.10 Enfield Town Centre has some lovely buildings and spaces (Chase Green, Central Library and Green, the Town Park and Market Square) but they are undervalued, almost unnoticeable in some cases. The emphasis is currently on moving traffic through the town as fast as possible, rather than making it a pleasant welcoming place for all users. Ironically the perceived need for multiple traffic lights interrupts efficient flow. The extensive one-way system cuts through and divides the conservation area and there is a huge amount of unnecessary street clutter. But the potential is high provided its assets are valued and clearly indicated and linked. The Mini-Holland/Cycle Enfield bid may be the starting point for a major re-design which will make Enfield Town somewhere people choose to come in the 21st century. The form it takes should be decided by the community, not by borough traffic engineers.

3. Question and Answer Session

The vast majority of those present were in favour of the principles of BHB's presentation and felt that shared space, perhaps throughout the whole of the current one way system not just Church Street, would be the way forward. Many felt that shared space would also be appropriate in other parts of the borough. The hope was expressed that the Council employ BHB to design such a scheme.

3.1 In view of the huge amount of interest and number of people wanting to ask questions the Chairman allowed several questions to be asked and points to be made before asking BHB to respond to the issues raised rather than to individuals.

3.2 The main points raised by statements and questions from attendees were:

- How do we continue the debate and what should the community do next? Can the desired outcomes of the mini-Holland bid be achieved without segregating cyclists and buses and diverting all other traffic?
- Traders believe that cycle lanes and forbidding cars in Church Street will decrease business whereas opening up the streets will increase trade. A dedicated segregated cycle lane through Church Street will heavily impede deliveries and reduce trade. Surely the cycling initiative can be realised without preventing through traffic?
- There has been a public consultation with the MP present in Palmers Green. Why has there been no similar public consultation in Enfield Town?
- There was a great deal of concern about turning Cecil Road, a residential street in the conservation area where there are already heavy delivery vehicles and exits from car parks, into two-way traffic, diverting all cars, vans and lorries into it from Church Street. The majority of houses on Cecil Road have off-street parking and if traffic backs up it can be impossible to get out of their driveways. A shared space scheme on both Church Street and Cecil Road would enhance and bring together the currently divided conservation area.
- The concept of shared space was widely perceived by those present as the way forward for Enfield Town. But does driver behaviour change after some years having become familiar with a shared space scheme? Do drivers still drive intelligently and responsively?
- In Enfield Town there is an unusually high density of residents. Why should there be a priority for cyclists? The emphasis should be on pedestrians.
- The main problem for cyclists currently is not getting through the town but getting into the town as the approach roads and junctions are a cyclist's nightmare.
- Would the shared space scheme not work well in other parts of the borough where its principles are just as valid, especially areas where exchange is more important than movement (e.g. Palmers Green High Street)?
- The council should establish where the traffic is coming from and try to reduce through traffic by encouraging more use of Meridian Way. If the M25 gets blocked, huge amounts of traffic comes through Enfield Town instead and gridlock ensues.

4. **BHB response**

- As BHB had only been in Enfield for one day he could give no definitive answer as to what the correct scheme for Enfield would be and that development of any scheme has a long way to go. The purpose of a town centre is three-fold: economic, social and cultural expression, and it is possible to encourage cycling, walking and movement through a holistic approach. Congestion can be annoying but is actually a good sign as it shows the town is thriving.
- Capacity for traffic in Enfield Town is poor as there are so many traffic signals which prevent flow. Cecil Road is wide enough for two-way traffic but is effectively a race track as drivers speed through on a green light, encouraged to bank at speed around the strange banana-shaped island near the entrance to the Town Park.
- Changes to driver behaviour seem very durable. The Seven Dials scheme is now over 25 years old and still works in the same way with consideration to others shown by all road users. Familiarity, in this case, does not breed contempt.
- The re-design of Enfield Town centre should avoid prioritisation of any user. It should be useful, efficient and attractive. There is no need for special provision for cyclists but in shared space schemes cyclists numbers have risen and are a good indication of the success of the scheme.
- BHB agreed that the access to the town centre for cyclists is a problem and the mini-Holland bid has not focussed on junctions which lie at the heart of the problem. It is very

difficult to transform streets and it needs clear vision and will, which are political decisions. His role was purely to point out possibilities.

- There is a need to identify the centre of the town (the market place - currently ignored and ignored by the scheme) and work out how to link key points. Stations are important arrival points and should be clearly linked into the town centre and to principal buildings and green spaces. Streets that work well relate to both sides. Statistics show that controlled pedestrian crossings are more dangerous than none at all.
- The mini-Holland bid states that TFL is against a shared space option because of safety concerns. This is puzzling. In the light of the convincing safety statistics of shared space, enquiries should be made as to the reasons for their policy against it.
- The explosion in cycling is a great thing and should be encouraged. But rather than using TFL's approach of allocating and segregating space, it is more important to tackle driver behaviour and speed.
- Enfield Town should define the qualities the community wishes to preserve and develop and communicate these to drivers. There is no need to be pro- or anti-cycling. With good street design, streets are pleasurable public spaces for all users. The community needs to ensure that the correct political decisions are taken to allow this to happen.

5. Conclusions and aspirations

5.1 When the ETCASG saw that the proposals in the bid would damage rather than enhance Enfield Town it was convinced that there must be a better way of encouraging cycling through the Town whilst also improving it for all other users. The address by BHB demonstrated unequivocally that this is indeed the case and also that the principles he discussed should be capable of implementation elsewhere in the Borough affected by the bid proposals and, indeed, as a matter of general application.

5.2 ETCASG hope that a level of consensus can be reached around the following propositions:

1. The bid money available to re-design Enfield Town provides a rare opportunity to think about the future of Enfield Town and to address the negative characteristics identified in the Character Assessment.
2. The issues are very complex; they involve economic, environmental, planning and social as well as transport matters. A solution has to involve a balance between the various issues. A responsible approach is to promote consultation on a range of options and to try to get consensus on the best option. To propose a single solution, promoting the interests of a single group as the Council has done is not a sensible way forward. The Council's proposals will not and should not command public support.
3. Transport, whether by car, public transport, by bicycle or on foot, is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Many people cycle for pleasure and health reasons; but the vast majority travel in order to get somewhere. It is vital, in providing for the various modes of transport, not to damage or destroy the places people want to go to, especially places such as conservation areas recognised as having particular value to the community.
4. As is made abundantly clear in the Character Assessment, Enfield Town has suffered over the years as a result of growing traffic which has severed key routes for pedestrians and brought about complicated traffic junctions and other intrusive traffic management measures. These detract from the attractiveness of the Town as a place to visit. Poor development and competition from out-of-town shopping centres have contributed to its problems. It is still, however, a vital centre which we neglect at our peril. We must make it a more attractive place in which to work, live and visit, to shop or spend leisure time. Otherwise it will die.
5. It is important to re-integrate the elements of the Town which have been severed by traffic measures and the development of the shopping precincts.
6. It is important to encourage the growth of economic activity in Church Street and other shopping areas in the Town in order to attract visitors and stimulate good development.

5.3 The talk from BHB demonstrated that the ideas behind “shared space” could be utilised in re-designing Enfield Town to create a centre which is open equally and safely to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. On the face of it such an approach would appear to address and achieve the preceding objectives. It is very disappointing, therefore, that this approach was not considered in the bid process for the ostensible reason that it raised “safety” issues without further explanation, although the evidence would appear to indicate otherwise.

5.4 BHB’s talk also demonstrated that it is up to us, the residents, traders and users of the Town, to make it clear to the politicians not only that the present proposals are unacceptable but to insist that the Town is redesigned not by traffic engineers with a brief to get traffic through the town as quickly as possible and give priority to cyclists, but in such a way as to enhance it for all users and safeguard its future as a place where everyone will want to spend time.

5.3 It will not be easy to achieve. The concepts around removing the "protection" afforded by traffic lights, barriers, pedestrian crossings etc. and "designing" the speed you want for a road are not easy to grasp without the benefit of an inspiring presentation and seeing the Poynton Video. We have all lived so long with these "protections" that there will be a natural nervousness about removing them. When presented with an either/or alternative of "segregated lanes/shared space", many will reject "shared space" as too risky.

5.4 We must disseminate as much information as possible about "shared space schemes". In the absence of a champion for our objectives and "shared space" principles on the Council, the Council will not do this, so we must find ways of doing so. This will include talking to any affected people through any forum to spread understanding. We have to do this through groups and also by talking to individuals especially, for example, by talking to the elderly and disabled about how they access the Town. The ETCASG is a very small group and will do its best but hopes other groups will join the cause. Any help or ideas will be very welcome - please contact our Secretary (etcasg@hotmail.co.uk).

5.5 It is imperative that what we hope to achieve in the future for the Town is not prejudiced by work carried out in the guise of this scheme. One of the most important things to have come out of BHB’s presentation is an understanding of the amount of expensive “kit” which has been installed in Enfield Town in an effort to keep the pedestrians away from the traffic. There are financial consequences in the cost of maintaining that kit. We are constantly told that the Council has run out of money and yet they contemplate spending on another expensive scheme with more concrete, barriers and obstacles in the way of us, the users of our Town. What we (it’s our money, although it may be coming via Boris) and the Council need to understand is that when this scheme fails, it will be just as expensive to remove it (like the banana in front of the Park Gates) as it will be to install it.

5.6 Unfortunately, there is no “plan” for Enfield Town setting out the future aspirations for the Town. The Action Plan is long stalled. Some things do, however, seem obvious. BHB said start with the Market and a rejuvenated Market (dare we imagine a glass roof providing a wonderful all-weather space?) is an obvious goal which would be scuppered by the current bid plans. The provision of a public space in place of the “banana” linking the Town Park to the Library Green for pedestrians and cyclists is another.

5.7 We must keep up the pressure on the Council so that they will find it impossible not to include "shared space" as an option when they come to consult. The Consultants who are instructed to work up the Enfield Town proposals for public consultation must include properly considered and costed shared space proposals. We have to think about how we do this but all the interest which has been demonstrated has got to be helpful.

5.8 When it comes to the consultation we are promised, everybody who supports these objectives and is seeking a solution based on “shared space” principles must vehemently make their views known to the Council.