

Minutes from the Fighting for the Future of the EMD Meeting, 29 March 2009 St Mary's School, Rectory Road Walthamstow 4pm

Platform speakers:

- Bill Hodgson- The McGuffins Film Society
- Neil Gerrard MP- MP for Walthamstow
- Stella Creasy – Labour's Candidate for Walthamstow at the next election
- Caramel Quin- Cleveland Park Residents Association

Apologies: Cllr Marion Fitzgerald

Please note these are provisional minutes. Any points of clarification or factual error only should be emailed to stella@workingforwalthamstow.org.uk. The meeting organisers reserve the right to refuse alterations.

Speaker	Comments
Neil Gerrard MP	Welcomed everyone to the meeting. Thanked Simon Heathfield and St Mary's School for allowing use of building for meeting. Set out the purpose of meeting as opportunity to hear the residents views on what is known so far regarding the plans for the future of the EMD/ Granada cinema building and the likely new planning application by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (hereafter UCKG) to use the building as a church.
Bill Hodgson	Argued fate of the EMD is linked to the proposed development of a multiplex within the Walthamstow town centre arcade site. Queried the idea that a "silent majority" existed who wanted arcade development and called for a proper and open debate about both the arcade and the EMD. Also circulated copies of the pre-planning document submitted by the UCKG to the London Borough of Waltham Forest (hereafter LBWF) ¹ .
Stella Creasy	Read out a statement given for the meeting by the UCKG ² . Called for discussion at meeting to be open and democratic to allay the concerns set out by UCKG regarding public meetings.
Caramel Quin	Stated it was clear LBWF councillors would approve the application from their public statements so far. Set out four original themes for the discussion to cover which had been the focus of organising the meeting– the question of access to the building, censorship of performances, community use of screen one and learning from the experience of Catford. Also suggested the meeting consider the subsequent evidence of the church's plans as shown by the pre-planning document including the proposes to "wall off" screen one and also the reported plans for LBWF to invest £35million in developing the arcade site. This shows LBWF can access money.
Bill Hodgson	To help "mythbust" the notion that there are no potential buyers for the EMD who are cinema operators, quoted from LBWF documents to public inquiry in 2003 that set out the interest of two cinema companies (Cityscreen and Mainline pictures) in purchasing EMD building. Also pointed to UCKG press release and "subsequent letters to interested bidders" that there were buyers for the building. Also highlighted recent English Heritage statement that the interior of the building is in good condition.
Neil Gerrard MP	Called for contributions and questions from the meeting
Elizabeth Roberts	Proposed that the building should be turned into an Arts Centre

¹ Available on the McGuffins Website at www.mcguffins.info

² Available on www.workingforwalthamstow.org.uk

Wendy Davies	Argued that Waltham Forest has become a cultural desert since the 1980s and queried the likelihood the arcade development would go ahead. Argued that the success of non-English language film nights at the EMD when run by the McGuffins showed the market within Walthamstow for such films.
David Hecke	Contrasted LBWF with London Borough of Newham in the development of Leytonstone compared to Stratford where the local cinema now shows live opera. Asked what would happen to the Organ within the EMD. Attended the entire public inquiry in Catford where planning permission was given to the UCKG to use a cinema building for a church as the inspector was supportive. Argued members of the UCKG should ask questions about the propriety of the use of their funds to buy the building.
Neil Gerrard MP	Explained the history of the Catford cinema development and the proposed "dual use" of the building in question as both a cinema and a church through a partnership between the UCKG and a cinema operator. Project was abandoned and it was suggested this was due to the church renegeing on the deal for this partnership agreed as part of planning permission.
Bill Hodgson	Said the McGuffins were in contact with the cinema operator involved in the Catford project "who had walked away in disgust" at the actions of the UCKG.
Richard Grey	Member of the Cinema Theatre Association responsible for arranging screening of Sunset Boulevard at the Rainbow Theatre in Finsbury Park ³ . Argued the Catford project had not been successful as any cinema operator would need a large building to sub divide into several screens to be effective. Argued such partnership projects were "backgarden routes to turning the cinema into a church".
Jeremy	Stated local residents would like their cinema back and had no confidence in the potential of a shared use deal with the UCKG to deliver this. Argued there was a vocal section of Walthamstow that supported this position and that he had no confidence in the planning application process in LBWF.
Adrian Stannard	Representing the Waltham Forest Civic Society argued that his experience of involvement with the plans for the arcade and with the developers for this showed both the developers and LBWF reticent about involving the public in the plans for the future of the local area. This also includes proposals to develop the land behind the Town Hall and the proposals to move the swimming pool from the Pool and Track to the town centre site. Argued the Silent majority in Walthamstow want a cinema in the town centre. Stated Civic Society thinks any listed building is precious and it is vital that the EMD is restored. Stated there was no reason a church could not restore a building.
David Hyman	Argued that dual use of the EMD as both a church and a cinema was an unrealistic prospect, as film distributors would not wish to deal with ad-hoc bookers. Works in the film distribution industry and argued film distributors preferred regular relationships with cinemas rather than only occasional opportunities to show films.
Michael	Stated wanted to see the building being used as a cinema and was sceptical about the UCKG. Asked for more details about how a compulsory purchase order (hereafter CPO) could be arranged and wanted more information about the plausibility of this option
Paul Adams	Argued it was not democratic for large organisations that had financial resources to be allowed to buy a building and sit on it. Stated a multiplex would not be the same experience of cinema as the EMD and that a cinema is a facility for the whole community.
	Vote held to show preference between the use of the EMD as a cinema and the provision of a multiplex-unanimous support for EMD.
Sarah Bee	Stated the national importance of the building and possibility of getting Hitchcock ⁴ enthusiasts to visit. Argued it was important to pin down the UCKG on what "dual use" would mean. Stated the poor condition of the front of the building showed a contempt for the building and the local area.
Roger	Agreed with other speakers that restoration of the EMD was not simply about the fabric of the building but its use. Argued demolition of building preferable to preservation of the building in aspic for the private use of a minority. Queried whether the process of planning application showed dual use idea was "a non starter" and wanted to know more about what grounds could be given for refusal of planning permission.
Bill Hodgson	Planning permission has been refused previously at planning inquiry in 2003. This was won on planning grounds and shows that such grounds do exist. However stated difference between then and now was council support for EMD and reviving the cultural life of Walthamstow no longer existed.

³ The Rainbow Theatre in Finsbury Park is a former cinema which has been converted by the UCKG into a church

⁴ Alfred Hitchcock

Barry Bliss	Stated Walthamstow was one of the birthplaces of cinema in Britain. Argued the problem was the council was "hung" and therefore not confronting the problem of the UCKG's ownership of the building. This meant that there would be "planning permission given by default".
Neil Gerrard MP	Need to clarify what is known of UCKG's plans and suggestion that "dual use" is being put forward. UCKG proposing to allocate part of cinema for private hire rather than to set up partnership with cinema operator.
Bill Hodgson	Plans show proposals for portion of upstairs cinema being made available for private hire at commercial rates.
Jo Redmond	Need to approach application not with emotion but with arguments based on planning legislation. Gave example of recent campaign won by using details of use of planning laws.
Caramel Quin	Highlighted the public inquiry won on three points with the political support of LBWF. These were that the building was viable as a cinema, that this was the best use for the building as it was the purpose for which it was intended and that there was no other place within Walthamstow's town centre that cinema could be provided. Clear that this third point now no longer true given the proposals for the arcade. Asked the meeting whether the idea of a room within the building for hire was acceptable.
Bill Hodgson	Reiterated that LBWF no longer supported the EMD. Quoted from report by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister into the issue which stated "I am not convinced that the presence of faith based organisation in this part of Hoe Street would make a significant contribution to the vitality or viability of Walthamstow town centre. In arriving at this view, I have drawn upon conclusions formed during my visit to the Finsbury Park area, where the Rainbow Theatre is situated. I saw nothing in the commercial life of that area that appeared to benefit from the presence of a UCKG Helpcentre".
Shaun Brown	Asked whether there was evidence that the arcade proposals were viable given the lack of parking facilities near the site.
Bill Hodgson	Quoted study by Anthony Williams Consultancy, commissioned by LBWF, which states "the scale of Walthamstow town centre and the limitations imposed by the surrounding road system both indicate that a large multiscreen cinema complex would be completely inappropriate".
Martin Duncan Jones	Quoted the history of the arcade site including the involvement of Henry Boot, the possible provision of an Arts Centre, the possibility of St Modwen ⁵ "walking away" from the development. Argued that there was no in principle objection to the local authority borrowing money or no problem with the UCKG per se. Argued problem was the "secret agenda" of UCKG.
Bill Hodgson	Stated the public intention to provide a multiplex cinema at the arcade site had stopped the EMD being sold.
Cllr John Macklin	Argued LBWF made a mistake in May 2006 by making public proposals to bring a multiplex to the arcade site that made it difficult to do anything with the EMD. Highlighted report suggesting LBWF could borrow £45m but stated LBWF was "rushing out" proposals. Stated Cllr O'Rourke had been to a meeting with English Heritage where it was revealed that meetings had been taking place on the future of the EMD for two years. Argued that council decision making was not always straight forward. Suggested using section 106 monies in meetings with UCKG. Stated he thought he UCKG may go along with a planning application and then walk away from any commitment to community use. Gave details of a meeting that took place between himself and the UCKG at which they mentioned a public performance space but not a cinema given one was planned for further down the road. Pointed out there were master plans for the town centre but no buildings and it was important for the residents to challenge the council. Stated the Lib Dem Group had said no to the arcade plans however "if we can borrow money to build arcade can borrow money to buy EMD".
Bill Hodgson	Pointed out the cost of purchase of the EMD would be around £1.4m. A CPO would deliver the EMD at today's market value irrespective of what UCKG had paid in 2003.
Caramel Quin	Asked the councillors in the room to state whether they were in favour of a CPO for the building or not
Cllr John Macklin	Stated he wasn't against the £1m in fees a CPO would cost, as that would be money well invested and progressed.
Roz Newnham	Clear now what the silent majority actually feel so wanted the meeting to discuss what could be done to achieve this.

⁵ St Modwen are the developers currently in negotiation with LBWF to develop the arcade site in Walthamstow Town Centre.

Jo Brind	Pointed out the UCKG were a Christian church who also run a TV channel in Brazil. Argued that it could be possible to work with the UCKG as many churches were moving towards providing cinema through the digitisation of cinema.
Katherine Green	Stated frustrated at having to go to Stratford to go to the cinema as money spent on entertainment was money going out of Walthamstow that could go towards local economy. Need to identify way forward and clear that couldn't be achieved through working with church.
Unknown	Felt that Cllr Macklin was being cynical and crying wolf to suggest ignorance about plans for the arcade site as was part of the LBWF cabinet. Also pointed out Lib Dem involvement in closure of St James Street Library. Cllr Wheeler also involved in this so speaker had no faith in either representative.
Rob Byrne	Wanted clarification if the public inquiry was won on argument that there was no other cinema in the borough as this was still true given that no building work had taken place on arcade. Also wanted details of how a CPO could be obtained.
Neil Gerrard MP	Talked through process of a CPO that would involve LBWF issuing the order to which the owner can object. If owner did object, there would most likely be another further public inquiry into the order that would be determined by an external inspector.
Edward Ward	Asked why proposals for the arcade and for the EMD were not being developed together as one site.
Cllr Terry Wheeler	Stated he was at meeting to take notes on the public's views. Wanted to correct the discussion so far of £35 million for the arcade and stated this was a misleading figure. Original retail project for arcade site was going to cost this but realised last summer this project was not possible. Stated it was important to keep arcade project on track and therefore replaced retail element of arcade with proposed leisure facilities project instead. This new project would have a large element of public sector funding which means that LBWF would take over as the banker for the project. However the borrowing this would entail is not the same as public funding for projects such as schools as using public borrowing ability to fund "bridging loan" rather than pay for project. Pointed out the Liberal Democrats had been involved in discussions about replacing the retail element of the arcade with leisure since the summer. Turning to the EMD, argued that planning permission for the building to be a church had been refused in 2003 and that between 2003 and 2006 there had been the opportunity for the building to be bought. However, this hadn't happened. Argued this was because cinema hadn't been profitable in Walthamstow prior to the purchase of the EMD by the UCKG. Said the priority now was to maintain the building and it was clear that the UCKG would not sell it. Therefore issue was what could be done with building. Argued it was not comparable to Stratford cinema as had been built with money from Stratford City Challenge. Stated LBWF had done consultation with the borough. Had also personal fondness for Granada/EMD. Stated issue of CPO was not relevant as want to redevelop the arcade. Stated pool element of pool and track provision will be better in town centre site.
Unknown	Stated a Liberal/Labour coalition were jointly responsible for LBWF and the Liberals should withdraw from this coalition otherwise their words were "hypocrisy as they are in bed with New Labour". Argued if the Liberals don't want to leave the salaries they get in the cabinet, then the meeting should put up candidates, especially ones who could fight for the William Morris Gallery and to save Walthamstow Market. Argued there were no principles amongst the politicians and needed William Morris Socialist candidates.
Bill Hodgson	EMD sale negotiations collapsed when it was leaked that LBWF were intending to put a multiplex in the arcade building. Suggested that if LBWF were so keen to work with the UCKG they should find them a space in the arcade development itself.
Jeremy Cameron	Stated that the bickering between different political parties was best suited to the letters page of the local paper. Argued the meeting clearly showed the public wanted a cinema not community access to a church. Thus a CPO was required.
Neil Underwood	Asked why a listed building was being considered for change of use and suggested UCKG should go and buy a vacant plot of land to build on rather than use EMD building. Wanted to know if English Heritage had been involved in the issue given it was on their "buildings at risk" list.
Ellie Merton	Gave example of Cambridge and the efforts made by local residents to save town centre cinema. Highlighted provision of cinema in out of town location by local council that wasn't suitable. Wanted to know whether the "Cultural Olympiad" would provide funding for the EMD and if there had been any contact with Picturehouse cinemas over this matter.

Bill Hodgson	Stated there were cinema operators still interested in the building.
Neil Gerrard MP	Cultural Olympiad funding is earmarked for other projects e.g. National Shakespeare Festival and for sponsorship money rather than projects such as this.
Mike Keegan	This is an issue about the viability of Walthamstow as a place to live in the future. Need a strategy for the town centre but current plans do not include the area in which the EMD is sited. Combined with big screen, proposals for demolition of theatre in Lloyd Park and "swimming pool madness" shows need for action not just strategies.
Unknown	Wanted to know who in the room wanted to fight for a CPO.
Sue Wheat	Argued it was vital in the current economic climate to keep money in local area. Need to protect local market and industries from multinational companies.
Liz Hyder	Raised the cultural heritage of Walthamstow including being the birthplace of Hitchcock, Michael Nyman and Peter Greenaway. Argued EMD was a beautiful building and should be protected as such. Was proud of Walthamstow and did not want to make it like everywhere else. Should look at models like the Rio in Dalston or the Rex in Hampstead for local cinema. Wanted to record thanks to Cllr Wheeler for coming despite having unpopular things to say. Argued if LBWF intended to spend taxpayer money it was vital they had a voice. Clear meeting didn't just want a little room in the UKCG building but wanted to see the whole area regenerated including the town centre.
John Pridige	Pointed out that the national Liberal Democratic policy was to protect cinemas.
Bill Hodgson	Highlighted Waltham Forest famous as the birthplace of Alfred Hitchcock and LBWF famous as the local authority that demolished his birthplace to make way for a petrol station. A decision to abandon the EMD would also live on as a defining act of civic vandalism to the area.
	<p>Votes taken</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pursuing a CPO for the building – unanimous support 2. Community access to the building run as a church – unanimously opposed 3. The final vote concerned an alternative compromise plan whereby UCKG would relinquish control of the EMD in exchange for new conference facilities to be built as part of the Arcade redevelopment. 90% of those attending voted in favour of this solution while 10% voted against.
Caramel Quin	Urged participants to remember that a planning application was likely soon from the UCKG and that this was the primary issue at hand. Important to make sure participants lobbied their councillors and the planning committee, and attended the planning committee meeting
Stella Creasy	Read out note from Cllr Macklin " any discussion about the next steps (CPO) depends on what happens at planning committee. If it goes forward tie them into an agreement i.e. can section 106 monies be used." Urged everyone to sign up to further email updates on the future of the EMD and the proposed public exhibition regarding its future. Urged the local councillors and the church to engage directly with local people on the options for the future of the EMD and stated meeting was example of how this could be a positive and constructive experience. Thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed at 6.30pm.