

West Ealing Centre Neighbourhood Forum (WECNF)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

‘The Play’s the Thing’

WECNF was designated in March 2013. It is one of just ten Business Neighbourhood Forums in England.

Our members are only too well aware that community engagement is difficult, hard work and often missed out in plan making. Often there is no discernable community engagement during the formative stages of plan making.

So we decided to take a very creative approach to engaging with our 352 businesses, the residents in our 3,478 homes and all those others with an interest in the centre of West Ealing. We commissioned the writing of a play about the past, present and future of West Ealing. The author (who also acted and directed) and all the actors gave their services for free.

The WECNF Chair conceived and produced the play as well as acting in it. The WECNF Secretary was the stage manager.

Forum members leafleted all the homes in the area and a number of retailers displayed our play poster. The ‘Ealing Gazette’ and ‘Ealing Today’ both promoted the play. The Forum’s web site (www.wecnf.org) and West Ealing Neighbours web site and blog (www.westealingneighbours.org.uk) advertised the play performances

The play called ‘The Green Man’ was performed locally on 5 September 2013 at St John’s Church and at The Drayton Court Hotel on 12 September and The Forester pub on 17 September. 180 people attended in total. After each performance, which lasted about 35 minutes, we handed out questionnaires which posed four simple, questions:

What do you like about West Ealing centre?
What don’t you like about West Ealing centre?
What does West Ealing centre need?
Any other comments?

So far we have received 75 completed feedback forms from the audiences and 53 of these respondents are new WECNF members. Our membership now stands at 169. The quality of feedback is very high and highlighted lots of common threads and also offered new ideas. We think the play encouraged people to really think about their environment and we were surprised at how many people spent a lot of time thinking out their feedback comments in detail.

In August we loaded a short trailer of the play onto YouTube and a recording of the whole 17 September performance was uploaded on 20 September. Type 'West Ealing Centre Neighbourhood Forum' on the YouTube web site to view the play.

The play phenomenon has galvanised our committee and reached parts of our community the Forum has failed to engage with before. However, we still have more work to do in engaging better with the two Council estates, the mosque, the Hindu temple and more of the traders.

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Chair, WECNF
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Version: 4
23 September 2013