

## **Response from Councillor David Longstaff Chairman Barnet Town Team**

Email 25.11.2014

I have been somewhat busy of late and along with IT issues I apologies for not getting back to you sooner. Your tweet and article on the Barnet Society webpage has reminded me.

The Barnet Society tweeted, to 817 followers that two shops in the High Street were closing, although you don't mention which two, and followed with an article about the parking etc. Derek Dishman (1,383 followers), Hopscotch (315 followers) and Alan Wilkinson (116 followers) re-tweeted the Barnet Society Tweet.

I do wonder what the consequences will be of The Barnet Society publicly announcing in such inflammatory language that unnamed shops are closing by virtue of being forced out, the High Street is dying and that you feel the parking is dreadful on likely footfall in the run-up to Christmas. As Chairman of the Town Team it was disappointing to read.

Please tell me which two shops are being forced out and how?

Your photograph at the start of the article is of a wet, desolate high street in black and white with just a red traffic light. How will this manipulation of the reader help the High Street?

Despite you writing inaccurately that discussion with the Council came to no avail, the current parking rules and major changes actually came in as a result of several meetings between various local groups, Council officers, members of the CBTT, Councillors and the Lead on parking, Cllr. Dean Cohen.

The parking changes have increased car park usage. If that increase in visitors is not being felt in all parts of the High Street, then one has to ask, why? One example is Hoole + Harris, which is frequently busy. If the presence of those customers is not translating into sales for other shops in the area, then why?

Your article refers to a detailed argument, but it did lack some data. In order to take this further I, and the Environment Committee, will need further information:

1. Your call-to-arms for an hour free on the High Street doesn't state whether you want 'one hour free and no return' or whether it's 'one hour free and then you pay'. Please let me know.

2. Please could you give an analysis of how many extra shoppers you believe would be attracted to the High Street as a result of the changes you recommend and how that will impact on local business.

3. What will be the pattern of parking behaviour – assuming you want to give them one hour free and then they can pay - do you see them staying for only one hour then leaving or does your analysis suggest they will want to stay longer?

4. Please could you clarify the likely impact on traffic movement and pollution as drivers look for available space on the High Street, which currently has very high occupancy.

5. As stated above, the High Street has high occupancy, how will change increase occupancy?

6. Please would you provide accountancy figures that will evidence and highlight the issues that shops are facing. This will help to inform the committee on the need for parking changes. I appreciate these figures would be commercially sensitive and would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

7. Gordon Massey has written to you with his analysis of the parking. I'd be very interested to read your thoughts on that – especially as you didn't reference or comment on them in your article.

8. Would you also let me know how many members of The Barnet Society were consulted before you wrote your email and article.

I'm not trying to be awkward but there are serious consequences that must be considered. I've copied Cllr. Dean Cohen into this email as he is the lead on this issue, but any changes have to be passed by the majority of the Environment Committee, which is responsible for their section of the Council's budget. I'm sure the changes you want would then be wanted across the Borough, especially as any changes would be seen by all Councillors at the Committee. The Council have an estimated £72m to save over the coming five years as part of the Public Spending Review and every committee must present a balanced budget.

9. Income from car parks, which I believe is considered 'Council Income' as it comes from council land rather than income resulting from traffic measures on the Highway (CPZ/On-Street parking) and therefore put into the 'Special Parking Account', will be reduced. Please will you indicate whether the Barnet Society would support an increase in the Council Tax (any increase in the Council Tax above 1.99% requires a local referendum) or which Council Services you'd agree to reduce to balance the budget.

Whilst I appreciate the concerns raised by The Barnet Society and I'm happy to take them forward and present to the Environment Committee I feel there needs to be more detail and a robust case. At the moment what you're describing and what I see are different.

I was at Fitzjohn car park last Friday afternoon around 4pm and there were eight spaces available and all at the furthest point from the entrance. I then walked up to the High Street to have a look at #1 Church Passage and there were hardly any parking spaces available.

It should also be noted that the Council controls less than 40% of the spaces in the area. Parking in Barnet Council spaces is cheaper than The Spires car park, the London Underground Car Park and the car park at the back of the Red Lion Pub. I feel you need to also take your campaign to other car park owners.

I look forward to hearing from you in order to take this campaign forward.

Regards,

Cllr. David Longstaff