

The Barnet Society's Message to Sadiq Khan...

OUR RESPONSE TO THE MAYOR OF LONDON'S "A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS"

1. ACCOMMODATING GROWTH

Town centres and High Streets

- a. The Mayor wants to see more **development in town centres**, which he calls 'hubs for retail and community activity'. The Barnet Society agrees that, as retail methods evolve and housing need increases, it makes sense to focus development in these areas, provided that it is carried out to a suitable scale and sufficiently high quality.
- b. He is going to be looking at **TfL-owned land at/around railway stations** and will be promoting 'significant and much higher-density housing development' in such locations. Any intensification should, if done well, aid our ailing High Street and historic Market. This would be welcome, especially since the Mayor clearly states that he wishes to continue to protect the Green Belt and other designated green spaces.
- c. Nevertheless, we believe there are limits to development around **High Barnet Station** without eroding the greenery which makes it one of Chipping Barnet's attractive 'green gateways'.
- d. Although development would be easier around **New Barnet Station**, we are alarmed at the recent dramatic loss of businesses in its vicinity due to residential conversion of commercial buildings.
- e. We wish to make it clear, however, that we would not welcome indiscriminate **densification of Outer London residential areas** away from High Streets and transport hubs. The prospect of intensified suburbs without adequate transport and other facilities will not persuade residents of Outer London that this is a plan for all Londoners.

2. TRANSPORT

Priorities for Outer London

- a. Chipping Barnet's green spaces are key to its character. More use of them for **pedestrian and cycle travel** between neighbourhoods should be encouraged.
- b. We appreciate the difficulties of improving road capacity in our area, and generally we support restraint of **vehicle use** – but only if commensurate improvements are made to **public transport**.
- c. The Mayor should consider more **orbital links** between Barnet borough and adjoining authorities – preferably tram or light rail – including across the Green Belt where necessary, to link new destinations on either side of the borough.

- d. Chipping Barnet's **bus connections**, though good to and from the south, need improvement to the east, west and north into Hertfordshire, particularly to and from larger shopping centres and our local hospitals. Our significant and growing population of students and elderly residents are particularly dependent on them, but they have not benefitted from the same investment as Central London – where bus use has actually reduced in recent years due to traffic congestion.
- e. **Oyster cards** should be valid for all public transport trips made within and in the vicinity of Greater London. Chipping Barnet has suffered particularly in this regard as services 84, 84A & 614, which used to be included for sections of their routes, are now excluded. Nor can Freedom Card holders use them before 9:30am, precluding early hospital appointments. The anomaly is that Oysters are usable on routes to or from Enfield & Southgate to Potters Bar, but not Chipping Barnet. This does not reflect well on TfL's intention to maintain a London bus network within and in the vicinity of Greater London, and must be addressed if public transport usage is to be encouraged as London grows.
- f. We would welcome **more flexible bus services**, particularly linking The Spires shopping precinct, Barnet Market, Barnet Hospital and High Barnet Station – including, if possible, provision of a procured small minibus service using the station yard.

3. AN INCLUSIVE CITY

Healthy Environments

- a. Chipping Barnet is blessed with many fine natural advantages, particularly its proximity to so much open and interlinked space. We have much to contribute to the ongoing debate about what constitutes an **inclusive and healthy environment**.
- b. More should be done to exploit these features and also to encourage the general level of wellbeing among our residents. Maintaining and encouraging good **healthy lifestyles** will be important, right from the early years of school through to retirement.
- c. To facilitate the Mayor's wish for successful growth, sufficient and well located **provision for health, sport, open space, recreation and lifelong learning** will be essential.
- d. We welcome the Mayor's respect for the **distinct character** of different parts of the city. The London Plan must include adequate protection and enhancement of the buildings, landscapes and other features that are so important to the character, **culture and history** of an area.
- e. We would like to see practical encouragement of **voluntary groups** – charities, civic societies and the like – and especially local organisations working across communities to bring people together and create a sense of community and place, since recruitment of new members and maintenance of activity levels is increasingly difficult.

4. ENVIRONMENT

The Green Belt and other open spaces

- a. We welcome the Mayor's determination to protect the **Green Belt** and other designated green spaces, because our Society was founded 70 years ago specifically to protect

such lands in and around Chipping Barnet. His support is especially helpful now that pressure to build is probably greater, and planning policy weaker, than when we were founded.

- b. The value of green spaces is multiplied, visually and ecologically, when they link together. In Barnet's Dollis Valley, for example, the almost seamless **continuity** of Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, Sites of Nature Conservation and Scientific Interest, etc. with private gardens and undesignated greenery creates a wonderful linear park that benefits wildlife and any Londoner who wishes to access it – and more should be encouraged to do so.
- c. In our case, the Dollis Valley and the greens, commons and woods that surround us on three sides also carry **historical associations** of national significance such as the Battle of Barnet – archaeological investigations into which are in progress; and Barnet Market and Fair – London's essential livestock market and entertainment centre for centuries.
- d. We strongly believe that the Green Belt should remain much as when it was first created. In practice, however, we accept that changes have inevitably occurred, and that this process is likely to continue. However, we could only accept **development** where housing, educational or other need is most convincingly demonstrated, supported by rigorous appraisal of alternative options, costs and benefits.
- e. Any resulting architectural, transport and landscape schemes must be to the **highest design and environmental standards**, with sufficient and appropriate compensatory planting, amenity space and provision for wildlife.

Delivering the National Park City

- f. The aims of the proposal for a '**National Park City**' are quite consistent with our own, which are to defend the range and quality of Chipping Barnet's open spaces and encourage local interest and involvement with our heritage.
- g. From published information to date, we are unclear how the 'National Park City' would sit alongside our own Council's recently adopted strategy for parks and open spaces. The latter is well-intentioned but lacks local plans or funding. If the new London Plan can galvanise a more proactive Council approach to park and open space **planning and management**, and offer **access to funding and sanctions for failure** to protect and enhance them, we would be glad to support it.

Sustainability

- h. The Mayor's **targets** for air quality, energy efficiency, a zero-carbon city by 2050 and other aspects of the environment are ambitious but admirable.

5. HOUSING

Suburban intensification and the existing housing stock

- a. The Mayor predicts that London's population will grow to 10.5 million by 2041, putting pressure on housing, transport and the environment, and **new and more diverse housing** is one of his highest priorities. We welcome this. It is vital, however, that the infrastructure is also increased such as health provision, schools, transport, parking, etc.

- b. We are very pleased to see the Mayor recognises the importance of maintaining the **Green Belt and other green spaces**. These spaces will become even more important as current housing developments are much denser than those provided in the past.
- c. Until recently, Chipping Barnet was a relatively **mixed community** in terms of income and home tenure, and we would like to restore that balance as much as possible.
- d. We are pleased that the Mayor is continuing with the policy that 50% of all new homes be **affordable**, though a target of 35% (with no viability assessments allowable) may be more realistic. It should be applied on a sliding scale up to 50 new homes. We suggest he returns to something like the previous planning permission Section 106 requirement to ensure that all new schemes include a percentage of affordable housing and encourage mixed communities.
- e. Affordability needs to be better defined. The current definition of property purchased or let at 80% of market value is **unaffordable** in Barnet. We also regret that the cap on housing benefit means many properties in Barnet are too expensive for those living on benefits in Barnet, and that they are being re-housed far from London, often where job opportunities are fewer.
- f. The Mayor needs to tackle the issues of **social rent**, (so-called) **affordable rent** and now the **London living rent**, which do not currently cover the cost of construction (over a set period of rental income), and with cutbacks on housing benefits are not affordable by many they are aimed at.
- g. In Barnet, **social housing** is meagre and dwindling. We wish to see a significant increase, for example through grant-aided rented accommodation or home ownership which is part rent, part mortgage, whereby the resident staircases up over a period of years until they own 100%.
- h. We support the Mayor's proposed Homes for Londoners Board. It will be interesting to see what **different models of affordable housing** proposed. Chipping Barnet has many successful almshouses, and its first co-housing development is about to open. Another welcome option would be housing for key workers currently being priced out such as nurses, hospital porters, teachers, TfL workers, police and shift workers – not least for Barnet General Hospital, which is the biggest employer in our area.
- i. We welcome the Mayor's action to reduce the numbers of **rough sleepers**. Recent benefit changes have led to an increase in homelessness, and we believe more shared housing needs to be provided. We support the Housing First model of permanent accommodation quickly backed up by tailored support, which research shows to have been successful in tackling rough sleepers in other countries.

6. ECONOMY

Space for SMEs and affordable workspace

- a. One of the Mayor's main priorities is to support **small and medium-sized businesses** by protecting existing workspace, identifying new workspace areas, including places of work in new housing developments, and including affordable business space in new commercial developments. This sounds positive and encouraging to us because until recently Chipping Barnet had many such businesses, but their number has dwindled drastically.

- b. He also proposes Creative Enterprise Zones, designed specifically for artists and creative workers who find it difficult to afford to work in London, and wants to develop innovative financial models to support small **creative businesses**. London cannot afford to lose these, yet many smaller, less profitable workspaces are being converted to housing following the Government's recent changes to permitted development rights. Chipping Barnet was historically a setting for innovative start-ups such as cine cameras and medical equipment, and could once again be an attractive home for such businesses.
- c. Within Chipping Barnet, several hundred new homes are currently being planned or constructed. It would make sense if at least some of the **incoming earners** could find work locally.
- d. We welcome the Mayor's commitment to improving **digital connectivity**. Parts of Barnet suffer from exceptionally poor broadband service, which is a significant brake on business.