

Busiest year, with Station, Whalebones and Victoria Quarter

Robin Bishop writes

Until lockdown in March, the past year was the busiest for the Society that I've known. The biggest proposals have been for High Barnet Station (292 flats), Whalebones (152 homes), the Victoria Quarter (652 flats) and Kingmaker House (145 flats). We accept the need for new housing, but opposed them on grounds of overdevelopment.

But we have several challenges. Sadiq Khan and Barnet Council have housing targets to meet. Both the draft London Plan and Local Plan encourage high-density development around transport hubs. The government can over-ride refusal, and the Housing Secretary, Robert Jenrick, has recently approved several high-rise and green-field housing projects. In the wake of Covid-19, construction of 'shovel-ready' schemes like these will likely be seen as a great way to kick-start the economy.

There was also a surge of smaller projects. Altogether, we reviewed 121 planning applications and submitted comments on 41 (including 30 objections, 72 per cent of which the planners agreed with). But we also supported sensitive design in appropriate places, such as Bridle Mews, Dury Road, Hendon Wood Lane and Salisbury Road.

The professed commitment of the Council, Mayor of London and government to protecting the Green Belt hasn't prevented damaging proposals coming forward, including for a power station off Partingdale Lane and a house off Langley Row, Hadley. The Council is also persisting with its £11.2m leisure hub in the middle of Barnet Playing Fields. We opposed them all.

We did, however, support The Totteridge Academy's application for a city farm – a welcome revival of agriculture in the Dollis valley. I'm also glad to report that the re-landscaping of Old Fold Manor Golf Club, which caused us great concern for the past



The re-landscaping of Old Ford Manor Golf Club has been a bone of contention for years five years, seems to be settling in. Once the new planting has grown up, the loss of the ageing Poplars along St Albans Road should be bearable.

Just before lockdown, a group of us planted 50 hawthorn trees on Barnet Hill, thanks to free saplings from the Woodland Trust, guidance by Ivana Turner from the Council, and volunteers from Kisharon, the Jewish charity. It was a fitting celebration of Tu B'shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Tree – and an apt gesture in the 75th year of a Society founded to safeguard Barnet's greenery.

In addition to all that, we commented in detail on Barnet's draft Growth Plan and Local Plan, and on its proposal for a new Heritage Advisory Panel (which we support, albeit with caveats). We also succeeded in getting 45 buildings of architectural and/or historical interest added to Barnet's Local List – though that hasn't saved No.1 Sunset View from being gutted by its owner.

We continue to be active in the Chipping Barnet Town Team, Conservation Area Advisory Committee, Federation of Residents' Associations of Barnet, London Forum and London Green Belt Council. My thanks go to Peter Bradburn, Guy Braithwaite, Simon Kaufman, David Lee, Markus Geiger and Nick Saul for adding their expertise to our cause.

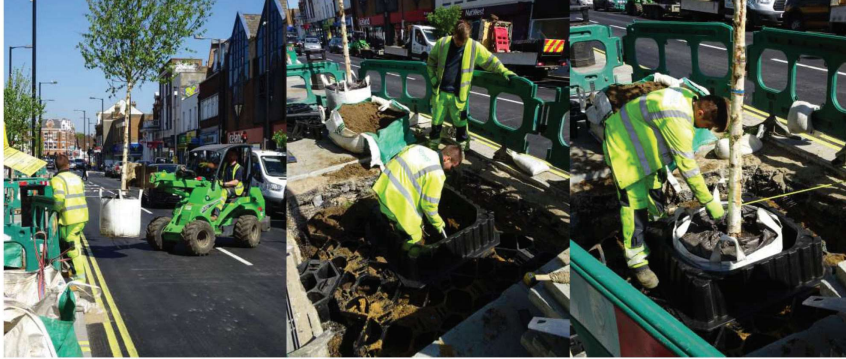


The planters: members plant 50 hawthorn trees on Barnet Hill before the lockdown.

The trees were given to the Council by the Woodland Trust

Green shoots in town centre

Robin Bishop writes



Workers plant Chinese Red Birch trees as part of the High Street improvements

Despite Covid-19 delivering a hammer-blow to already struggling town centres, there are positive signs in Chipping Barnet. Eight trees have been planted in the High Street and Council's consultants, Architecture 00, are pushing ahead with a Community Plan.

The trees have already improved the look of the High Street. They are Chinese Red Birches, tall enough to make an impact, but with compact canopies to minimise overshadowing and leaf-fall. They have pretty bark that will vary in colour during the year. They've been planted in perforated plastic crates within deep pits to protect, irrigate and aerate them, which should ensure their survival.

Their arrival is quite a symbolic moment. Back in 1998, our Vice President David Lee – then Chair of the Society's Planning & Environment Committee – first proposed a 'Green Chain' of trees from the foot of Barnet Hill to Hadley Green, so that residents and visitors would never be out of sight of a tree.

In 1999 nearly 50 trees were planted by the Council, including London Planes and Norway Maples up Barnet Hill. Eight years ago, Ginkgos and Liquidambar along the lower High Street and others near St Albans Road followed. But the central stretch of High Street was the missing link in the chain. The main obstacle was the network of drains, pipes and cables under what was then a fairly narrow pavement.

In 2012, the Society proposed building out sections of the pavement to make room for trees, as has been successfully done elsewhere in London

and the UK. This would reduce the domination of traffic, enhance air quality and make them more accessible and attractive for parents with children, those with disabilities or impairments, and the elderly. Together with de-cluttering and other improvements to the urban realm, they would transform the perceptions of residents, traders and visitors of the High Street, and make a significant contribution to regenerating the town centre.

In 2017, Transport for London agreed to pay for the project out of the Outer London Fund. Since then we've worked with Highways and the Town Team to get the design details right. After many delays work is almost complete, and new benches and other street furniture – including a Battle of Barnet information board – will be installed before long.

It's ironic that Covid-19 should slam the brakes on this ambition – though at least the wide pavements make social distancing easy! But the Council – and the Society – takes the view that it is all the more important for us to have a regeneration plan.

Drafting of the Chipping Barnet Community Plan, which was launched in January, is therefore continuing. Virtual workshops are being held with stakeholders in May, and a public exhibition of possible projects will go online for six weeks from 17 June. 'We asked the Council for a display in the town centre. Regrettably for those without computer access, the answer was no. In August we'll be involved in selecting five projects for detailed feasibility study and costing. The whole Plan will be complete by the end of November. We'll keep you informed. You can also contact the consultants direct at cbcommunityplan@gmail.com and 217 Mare Street, London, E8 3QE.



Founded in May 75 years ago, it's appropriate for us to celebrate with a photo of May blossom - the glorious flowers of the hawthorn tree - especially as these specimens were planted by Society volunteers at Whiting's Hill for our 50th

Let's hear it for Robin

We would like to thank Robin Marson, who has decided to step down as Vice President in June, for his 25 years' service to the Barnet Society. Our Vice President and former Chairman Jenny Remfry, who worked with him, pays tribute:

"Robin was a great servant to the community and charitable organisations of Barnet. He joined the Barnet Society as Hon. Treasurer in 1995, a post he held for seven years, where his experience and skills in administration were greatly appreciated. He was already a Church Warden of St John the Baptist and clerk to the trustees of the Hyde Foundation. After retirement from business he became clerk to the trustees of Thomas Watson Cottage Homes and President, then Hon. Secretary, of Barnet & East Barnet Rotary Club. After his move away from Barnet to Codicote, he and Jasmine have remained active members of Barnet Museum."