

# Fight for good design in Barnet is far from over

**The Society might often seem to object to change, but in fact we've often supported good new design, whether traditional or modern, writes Robin Bishop.**

Here are some recent examples, The Signature care home on the former Marie Foster Home site, Wood Street is in the Arts & Crafts manner of Ravenscroft Park and other nearby Victorian and Edwardian villas. The design of building and landscape benefited from early consultation with us.

We also supported Linden Homes' 114 dwellings at Elmbank. Their style wouldn't have been out of place in Hampstead Garden Suburb a century ago, but it suits Arkley and retains mature trees on the site.

However, we also support

modern design if it respects its neighbours. We disliked the initial designs for Barnet College, which would have dominated the Tudor Hall and competed with St John the Baptist's Church. The architects responded by removing a floor, using russet wooden panels to harmonise with the Elizabethan brickwork, and framing the older buildings with colonnades that create an attractive new semi-public piazza.

Brook Valley Gardens, which is replacing the Dollis Valley Estate, is also in a bold 21st-century style. Many of its 631 homes are 2 & 3-storey family houses with gardens lining traditional streets. There are some higher blocks of flats, but they are sensitively sited and in the same brick as the houses.

**Refused: Whalebones plan by architects Pollard Thomas Edwards (below) And bottom Elmbanks, by OSP Architecture**

The result is a nice balance of unity and diversity, enhanced by excellent landscaping.

On a more modest scale, the Older Women's Co-Housing fits discreetly into Union Street, its massing and brickwork resembling but not aping its neighbours.

We also supported this development because it's a pioneering UK example of co-housing, for 26 women in this case. Each resident has their own privately owned or rented flat, but shares communal facilities and a garden.

All the above developments have in common a human scale, natural materials and respect for existing urban grain.

Unfortunately the low-density suburban house-and-garden model that has worked for 150 years is less and less profitable in London. Today, market homes are affordable by only 8 per cent of its population.

Other kinds of housing will often be necessary, but that needn't be a bad thing.

Higher densities were achieved in Bloomsbury in central London and Bath without exceeding 5 or 6 storeys in height.

In the 1960s & 70s Camden built many housing estates that did the same,

and several are now nationally listed. Skilful site planning can achieve the same today – but it has to be right for its site.

When the former Brake Shear House employment site behind Barnet High Street was sold in 2015, we worked with the Council on a planning brief for a mixture of flats and houses with gardens, plus affordable workspace to offset some of the jobs that were lost.

We also asked for a new view to be opened up from the High Street towards King George's Fields and Hadley. The developer did that, producing a scheme for 8 homes and gardens and 32 flats rising to a maximum of 5 floors.

It also offered 789 square metres of workspace and sensitive landscape design, so we were pleased when it won planning permission in 2016.

The site was then sold on to Shanly Homes, who kept the general concept but narrowed the view through the site, raised the number of flats to 50 and their height to 6 storeys. They also propose to shut it off with a gate, which we oppose: that would lose not only the view but also the welcoming feeling consistent with recent High Street pedestrian improvements.

For the former gasworks, New Barnet Community Association worked with the Council and One Housing on a mix of 2 & 3-storey homes plus flats in 4-8 storey blocks.

Permission for a scheme of 371 homes was granted in 2016. We agreed that it was the right scale for the site between the town centre and Victoria Recreation Ground.

It was a shock, therefore, when this year Fairview & One Housing submitted a much bigger scheme for 652 flats in 14 blocks up to





Brake Shear House site: first design by architects Morrow + Lorraine (above) Victoria Quarter refused scheme by EPR Architects (left)



10 storeys high – and even more so that Council officers recommended approval despite its breach of several key Barnet planning policies.

We were among over a thousand objectors, and were gratified when councillors rejected the application unanimously in September.

We were also pleased when, the following month, permission for 152 homes on the Whalebones estate was refused. Ironically, their architectural quality was much better than in most applications.

Why did we object? For two principal reasons: it would have been a flagrant breach of Conservation Area and other planning policies, and our members overwhelmingly considered

it to be overdevelopment. A more modest scheme that conserves open space between High Barnet and Arkley would be more acceptable.

At High Barnet Station, Transport for London this year proposed to build up to 300 flats on the car park, and a planning application is expected very soon.

Our objection is not simply to six 6 & 7-storey slabs forming an almost continuous wall dominating Barnet Hill and the neighbourhood – though that would be bad enough, and contrary to Barnet planning policies.

We have submitted a long and detailed list of concerns about social, visual, technical and environmental flaws in the design.

Such a big development could only be justified as part of a package of community benefits and radical improvements to interchange between rail, bus, car and other modes. The current scheme would leave the station untouched, and make only minor changes to the pedestrian ramp and a bus stop.

The planning battles over Victoria Quarter, Whalebones and High Barnet Station aren't over: the Mayor of London has yet to have his say. There could be appeals, and fresh plans could be submitted. The fight for good, human-scale design in Barnet is far from over.



High Barnet Station 2nd proposal, architects Scott Brownrigg (above) Brook Valley Gardens, by Alison Brooks Architects (left)

**It was a shock, therefore, when this year a much bigger scheme for Victoria Quarter for 652 flats in 14 blocks up to 10 storeys high was submitted, particularly as council officials recommended approval**

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