

Planning & Environment – Robin’s update for Committee, 9 November 2023

PLANNING ISSUES

Government

The **Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA)** has come into force. It aims to speed up the planning system, but is less radical than the original proposals that the Society commented on (we were only one of many critics). Provisions that may affect us include:

- Design codes setting out where homes are built and how they look.
- Stronger powers to deal with breaches of planning rules and processes.
- Permanent relaxation of rules on outdoor seating for cafes, pubs and restaurants.
- Ensuring developers deliver schools, doctors’ surgeries and public services.
- New ‘street vote’ powers, allowing residents on a street to bring forward proposals to redevelop their properties in line with agreed design preferences.
- Cutting the ‘burdensome EU-red tape’ around environmental assessment.

LURA doesn’t end Michael Gove’s relentless mission. **Further reforms to planning policy**, including the creation of National Development Management Policies, were recently out for consultation. The London Forum advised us that it was aimed chiefly at planning authorities outside London, which has a working – if not perfect – legal framework, so we declined Mr Gove’s invitation to comment.

We can claim some credit for another Government change of mind, however. Following local fuss over the demolition of 33 Lyonsdown Road and the subsequent involvement of the Victorian Society – and spurred by the scandalous demolition of the famous ‘Crooked House’ pub in Staffordshire – it is consulting on changes to planning law to **prevent demolition of unlisted but historic buildings** without planning permission.

London Forum

I attended the **AGM of the LF** on 12 October. It’s been an excellent source of information about London planning matters over a very busy last few years.

Barnet Council

We expect final modifications to the draft **Local Plan** to go out to public consultation soon.

Green initiatives

We’ve been informally discussing green topics including **United for Warm Homes** with Barnet Friends of the Earth and other activists.

Barnet’s main source of carbon emissions is our homes, and I’ve posted two articles about how to upgrade them environmentally on BSoc’s website.

RECENT CASEWORK (SELECTION)

Consultations

The Spires – Since the public exhibition at The Spires in April, we’ve seen no further designs for the retail and residential redevelopment. BYM’s team promised us a revised version of their scheme ‘by the end of Summer’, and assured the us that they were keen to meet again ‘shortly’ prior to wider consultation, but as I write no date has been offered.

If and when we finally see the next plans, we and Barnet Residents Association are standing by to organise a meeting to discuss them with our members.

Green Belt cases

Intec House, 49 Moxon Street – No further news about neighbours' pursuit of a judicial review of the Council's decision to approve this.

Land off Langley Row, Hadley Highstone – Rebuilding of former stables in Green Belt. We didn't object.

Gaelic football pavilion, King George's playing field – Decision still awaited on this replacement for a previous pavilion. We were neutral.

Mays Lane, land between Chesterfield Farm and the former – Application for two travellers' pitches. We objected because traveller sites are inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Decision awaited.

Brethren hall, Mays Lane – Apparently the site has been acquired by an Islamic charity.

Sky Studios North, Rowley Lane – Decision awaited on 10 more sound stages.

Lower Kitts End Farm – Application to convert most of the agricultural buildings – which are unsuited for modern equipment – to industrial and warehouse. We didn't comment.

Byng Road playing fields – After much discussion by the Council and stakeholders, Barnet Elizabethans Rugby Football Club have received approval of their plans to rebuild their clubhouse and improve their pitches, but subject to a range of stringent conditions.

JOLT electric vehicle (EV) chargers

The previous Council administration signed a contract with Jolt Charge Ltd to install 120 EV charging points across the Borough. Although in principle a welcome contribution to reducing Barnet's carbon emissions, their less attractive feature is the large digital advertising screens on each side. They resemble the JC Decaux telecoms hubs that were proposed in 2020 for Barnet High Street – but are bigger. A particularly egregious case is the charger proposed in front of the Everyman (see below).

The chargers might not make much difference to the average shopping parade, but several are planned for conservation areas, where they would be completely out of character with their surroundings, and even next to listed buildings.

- *Do you agree that we should demand that the Council immediately halt the approvals of new JOLT EV chargers? (See my email attaching this report.)*



Conservation Areas & Listed Buildings

Whalebones – In September, Hill the developer submitted a new planning application. The plans have been scaled back from 152 to 114 homes, but in most other respects are similar to the ones we objected to in 2019.

This is a large development on land which a Planning Inspector described as a 'valuable undeveloped area of greenspace'. Some buildings would be of 5 storeys, i.e. the same as the tallest of the hospital buildings. The remaining open space would have the character of an urban park, not the rural character it has now – part parkland, part agricultural smallholding. The Inspector found the harms 'to strongly outweigh the public benefits which would flow from the development'.

The resulting loss of green space would also seriously harm the Wood Street Conservation Area. Anywhere else in the UK, surely, building over 6 acres of green space in a conservation area would be inconceivable. It would set a very bad precedent for Barnet's other conservation areas.

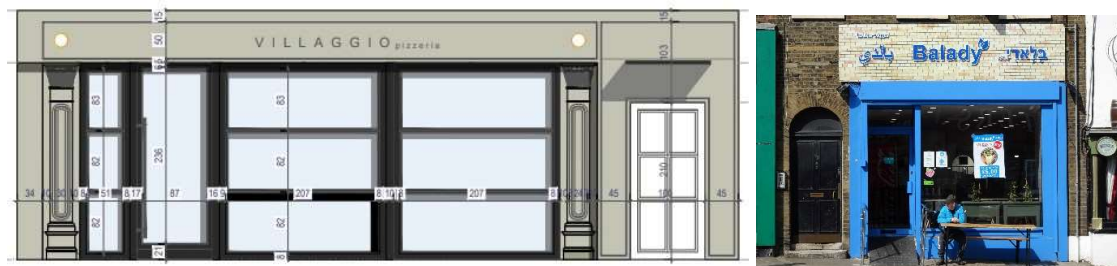
A housing development of this scale would also contradict other Council, London Mayoral and national planning policies in relation to open space, the environment and farming. Disregarding them would send Barnet residents a most unfortunate message about the Council's understanding of the value we increasingly attach to the natural environment – as well as to healthy eating and food security. It would also be inconsistent with Barnet's own declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency.

Following Nick Saul's enquiries and my web post about the non-arrival of Council letters to neighbours and commentators on the 2019 application, the planners have extended the deadline for comments to 12 December.

The Committee and its expert advisers are minded to object again. To be sure that we represent the majority of our members, we've written to everyone asking whether they are for, against or neutral about the application. I write before the final outcome is known (the deadline is the 10th). So far we've had 76 responses (15%). 66 (87%) support our objection and only 6 (8%) oppose it – fairly conclusive.

- *Do any other Committee members wish to vote? Otherwise I'll assume their neutrality.*
- *Will the Committee please confirm its decision to object to the application?*

1B Church Passage (fka L'Antica Pizza) – Another pizza restaurant, Villaggio, applied for a new shopfront in modernist style, but has withdrawn the application.



60 High Street (Balady) – The owner of this garish example appealed against the Council's refusal. Fortunately his appeal has been dismissed.

98-100 High Street (fka Foxtons) – Workspace plus 12 flats above. We were neutral. Decision still awaited.

118 High Street (the Grade II-listed former TSB & Barnet Press) – Costa Coffee on the ground floor. A separate application is in for conversion of the flats above. We were neutral.

4 Hadley Parade, High Street – Julian’s hardware grotto will be converted into a ‘mathnasium’. We had no comments.

Moxon Mews, Moxon & Tapster Streets – We supported this proposal for 21 new homes and commercial premises.

Everyman Cinema, Great North Road

The Society has strongly objected to that proposal. The Everyman (formerly Odeon) cinema is a striking landmark, not only for shoppers in Greenhill Parade but for the many travellers along the Great North and Station Roads. Designed by Edgar Simmons in 1934 in an elegant blend of art Deco and Moorish styles, it’s a fine example of a romantic but increasingly rare building type.

On the exact axis of the cinema’s symmetrical façade and within 5 metres of its main entrance, Jolt wants to plant a charger 2.7 metres high and 1.2 metres wide. It’s as if the mysterious tablet in *2001, A Space Odyssey* had landed – with added illumination and animated displays. The irony is painful and shows utter disrespect to the listed building, as well as annoying cinema-goers and the general public. It must be sent to join the Decaux telecom zombies in outer space.



Everyman Cinema, Barnet with JOLT EV charger and feeder in central pride of place

Refused

Bartletts Yard, St Albans Road – A new house on a tiny backland plot. We were neutral but expressed concern about impact of the big basement and construction. The planners ignored our concerns.

Decisions awaited



Victoria Quarter – In October Fairview & One Housing submitted yet another a planning application, this time for 486 homes – almost a third more than the scheme that was approved in 2017. It generally follows the 2017 layout, but replaces the terraced housing with taller blocks of flats and adds a floor to the ‘finger’ blocks. We’ve objected to it.

We generally support the objections of Save New Barnet relating to overheating, railway noise and inadequate daylight to a significant proportion of units, in part due to the height of the ‘finger’ blocks.

We particularly object to the housing mix and the poor environmental performance of many of the units.

In relation to the first point, we dislike the high proportion of small flats, the small number of family homes with three or more bedrooms (24%), the lack of larger homes (2% - none of which would be privately-owned) and the complete absence of traditional private gardens.

In relation to the second, we are concerned about the nearly 20% of the flats that would be single-aspect, making cross-ventilation in hot weather impossible, and the 46% that would require active cooling, the running cost of which would not always be affordable by occupants. Furthermore, almost all the flats would depend on mechanical ventilation and heat recovery (MVHR). We do not object to MVHR on principle, but its effectiveness and economy depend on high standards of specification, installation, maintenance and user behaviour, not all of which are normal in estates of this kind. Any shortfall risks resulting in condensation, mould, poor air quality, damage to the building fabric and potentially serious health consequences for occupants.

We also have second-order concerns regarding

- the busy palette of materials, textures and colours for blocks that are still large, muscular and inner-urban in character;
- how the scheme would relate to the path to the railway underpass;
- inconsistent eastern boundary line; and
- user-unfriendly cycle storage.

98-100 High Street (fka Foxtons) – Workspace plus 12 flats above. We were neutral.

130-132 High Street – 5 flats behind and above 2-storey building. No comments.

152 High Street – Extension up to the roofline of neighbouring buildings. We objected.

Brookfields Garage, Victoria Lane – Three unashamedly modern but inconspicuous houses and workspace on a backland site. We had no comments.

Fortune House, Moxon Street – The developers building a 7-storey building next door propose a similar, but only 6-storey, building for 41 flats and 2 workspace units. It's not as bad as its neighbour and won't harm the Green Belt, so we're neutral.

5 Regina Close – Roof extension under PDR in 2-story terrace refused.

Land adjacent to Whitings Hill Primary School, Whitings Road – We supported this proposal for 35 houses with gardens clustered around a shared green.

Western half of Meadow Works site, Pricklers Hill – We supported these 8 new family homes and gardens.

Further afield



Abbey Arts Centre, 87 Park Road, East Barnet – An unusual and interesting site with an extraordinary history. The replacement and new buildings are restrained in scale but lack architectural quality. It deserves a master plan based on more thorough analysis of the heritage values of the site.

Brookhill Court, Cat Hill – A revived 2019 proposal to add two storeys to this prominent building under PDR has been refused.

Edgware town centre – The row over redevelopment of the site next to the station rumbles on. 5,500 have signed a petition against the 'mini-Manhattan' proposed by TfL and developer Ballymore.