



# The Barnet Society

*Campaigning for a better Barnet*

Alexandra Beer  
Assistant Scrutiny Manager  
Planning Committee/Environment Committee  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London SE1 2AA

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Dear Ms Beer,

## **London Assembly – Protecting Green and Open Spaces through Planning Policy**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the London Assembly's review of protection of green and open spaces, as part of its review of the draft London Plan.

I am responding on behalf of the Barnet Society, a non-political organisation that campaigns for the preservation and improvement of the environment of Chipping Barnet and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1945 specifically to give a voice to local people who believed that the Green Belt needed defending, and has a membership of over 400.

Below are our replies to the London Assembly's questions. For a fuller view of Green Belt issues, please refer to the London Green Belt Council, of which the Barnet Society is a subscribing supporter.

- ***What is the value for London boroughs of having an open space strategy?***

The Barnet Society believes the value of open space in cities is very high – provision of places to play, exercise and relax are a vital ingredient for physical and mental health.

Chipping Barnet has been shaped by drovers' roads and greenways with their grazing strips, which for centuries brought livestock destined for London, and by its extensive fields, which fattened the herds and was the site of Barnet Market – the main marshalling point before their final journey to Smithfield. Much of this green space survives, and together with ancient woodland such as Hadley Wood surrounds three sides of the town, to the health and enjoyment of its residents, visitors and all who pass through.

Without the formation of the Metropolitan Green Belt around London in the 1930's, rigorously policed, we are certain that these open spaces would have been filled in years ago and would be under continuing threat of development, given the economic buoyancy of London and the relentless demand for new housing.

**Founded in 1945,** The Barnet Society campaigns for improvements to the environment of Chipping Barnet and surrounding areas and for protection of the Green Belt

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Inclusion of an Open Space Strategy is necessary in all Boroughs, whether they are in inner or outer London. Existing green spaces need full protection, and policies to provide new, fully accessible open space should be included for all major developments.

- ***Has London seen particular pressures on retaining its green and open spaces? If so, where do these pressures come from and how successful have the boroughs been in resisting development of them?***

Chipping Barnet and its environs have experienced constant pressure over the years, particularly for new houses or housing schemes, but also for commercial re-use of former farms and stables. A less obvious but growing pressure has been to intensify existing uses such as playing field and recreation facilities in ways that diminish natural – and sometimes ancient – greenery.

- ***Could you provide figures that identify the net change in the amount of the London's green and open space over the last five years? Alternatively could you point to specific cases where open space has been lost or is under threat?***

We are not in a position to provide figures, but the last few years have seen planning permission granted for a range of developments, such as conversion of historic meadow to school all-weather pitches, and of a stables to a horseball centre. Although these spaces have remained open, their natural green character has been eroded or lost altogether.

A specific local case that offers both a threat and an opportunity is the potential redevelopment of Barnet Football Club, which has left its former stadium (bordering Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt). The redundant buildings have no architectural merit and their replacement by, for example, well designed housing (including a proportion of affordable and/or social housing) would be welcome – but not to the detriment of the adjoining green spaces.

- ***Do you think the forthcoming review of the London Plan needs to strengthen any policy aspect that would help you and others, such as local authorities, to protect London's green and open spaces more effectively?***

The Society would welcome strengthening of the London Plan to protect green and open spaces to reinforce the policy and resolve of councils, particularly now that they are under great and increasing pressure to meet housing targets and to offset funding cuts.

For example, our own council, the London Borough of Barnet, has a policy, reiterated only last week by senior planners at a meeting of the Chipping Barnet Town Team, to protect the Green Belt. In practice, however, the last few years have seen permission granted for a range of developments. Although these spaces have remained open, their natural green character has been eroded or lost altogether.

Yours sincerely,

**ROBIN BISHOP**

Chair, Planning & Environment Committee