



The Barnet Society

Campaigning for a better Barnet

NEWSLETTER

August 2011



TA Centre St Albans Road – see p.10

STOP PRESS: Chipping Barnet wins £416,000 from the Mayor's Fund – see Page 8

CHAIR'S LETTER

As many of you will already know, the owners of Barnet Market received an extension to their 2005 planning consent at the Sub Committee meeting on 13 July, despite a concerted effort to get the Planning Officer's recommendation overturned. Over 70 residents attended the meeting and both Theresa Villiers and I spoke against the application.

Needless to say, we were very disappointed with the result as, in spite of the applicants' assertions, we are convinced that this is actually a residential development that happens to have some sort of retail/market on the ground floor and we certainly do not believe it will provide a suitable new home for our historic stall market. Over the extended period that the Council allowed the application to run, we wrote several times explaining our concerns and particularly pointing out that the application completely fails to provide adequate delivery or servicing. Of course, this put Council Officers in a difficult position because they had not picked up these shortcomings when considering the application in 2005 – to acknowledge them now would be to admit that they had not done a thorough job back then.

The Council's treatment of the Town Centre Strategy in their report to Committee was particularly galling. The report states „*...this strategy is still in the course of preparation and as such is not a material consideration in the assessment of the application.*“ Whilst this is true, it is only the case because the Council set up the Strategy Board only to abandon it before formally consulting and adopting the work it produced over many months. One of the main themes of the Strategy Board was to move the Market back into the centre of our town or, if that was not possible, at least to connect it through to the High Street via The Spires shopping centre. The Council are currently engaged in talks with the owners of The Spires regarding their plans for extending/redeveloping the shopping centre and so the opportunity exists to achieve this. In fact, when the owners of the Market first applied for planning permission to redevelop way back in 2001, the Council were very keen to see such connections made in any redevelopment proposal and a potential link was clearly included in the plans that received consent. Somewhere between the first and second applications, this idea was lost but, again, planning officers seemed loath to admit it.

Of course, the fact that the owners of Barnet Market have had planning permission to redevelop the site since 2002 but have failed to deliver their „vision“ is not a reason to refuse an application for extension. Nor, annoyingly, is the fact that they have managed to demolish the old market, lose many of

the stalls and turn the site into a disgraceful eyesore, and in a Conservation Area.

One of our stalwart stallholders, Andy Gardiner, spoke for the application. In fact most of what he said was in support of the Market, not the application, and we wholeheartedly agreed with him. The traders are in the invidious position of having to try to make a living on a half-empty and unsuitable site without any facilities. The owners promised them, yet again, that their dream market would be a reality as long as the consent was extended. Otherwise, they said they would have no choice but to close the Market....without explaining why.

The one concession the applicants made was to offer to reduce the period for extension to 2 years, instead of 3 (we had suggested just one). The owners claim they have developers lined up, ready to build, but we will see. The main achievement of the last few months was to get the arguments out in the open, to put pressure on the Council and the owners and to show the strength of support for the market.

Meanwhile plans are progressing for an extension to The Spires and a meeting took place recently at the Council with the owners, UBS (a bank), and their agents. We have not seen the plans yet but understand they may not be as extensive as first thought. The Council has drawn up a draft Planning Brief for the site and its immediate surroundings in the absence of a town Centre Strategy but based on much of what was discussed. As we keep saying, this should not be a stand-alone brief, but be considered as part of the whole town centre. We have made comments on Planning Brief and await a second draft. However, we've been told that this could take 2-3 months as the Urban Design Officer who prepared the draft is leaving the Council and it will take that time to get someone new in post. UBS should be consulting with local residents over coming months regarding their proposals and we will be pushing for what we believe the town centre needs.

Gail Laser gives her account later of the Mayor's Outer London Fund bid that Barnet Traders Association made via the Council in the last few weeks. She and her band of extraordinarily energetic helpers put huge amounts of time and effort into the submission document and we wish the bid every success, as it will benefit us all. The process has been frustrated somewhat by the Council amending the bid at the eleventh hour, but we trust this will not stop us getting a share of Boris's funds.

Barnet Museum's volunteers have submitted their draft Forward Plan to Barnet Council for review and await their comments. The Plan's aim is to

demonstrate that the Barnet & District Local History Society has a credible business plan that will allow the Museum to continue on its present premises. However this will only be possible if the Council agrees a minimal rent or capital asset transfer. How much longer does the Museum have to wait for an answer?

We understand that the PCT has finally decided to sell off the Marie Foster Home site on Wood Street (the derelict building that has been spoiling the appearance of this part of the Wood Street Conservation Area for the last few years) and we await future developments there with interest. We also understand that there will be reserved matters (ie detailed) applications going in to the Council shortly for the redevelopment of the Barnet Countryside Centre at the bottom of Byng Road. We will, of course, be looking at these carefully and making our comments in due course.



As with all the above, we continue to quiz and scrutinise, to push and challenge in order to get the best we can for our town centre and our neighbourhood.

As I write, the Government is publishing its latest changes to the national planning system, the biggest changes for many years. The new legislation will provide a presumption in favour of 'sustainable' development which is open to interpretation (and is potentially too liberal) and will provide much work for planning lawyers. The system certainly requires reform but we fear that the latest changes may be a case of baby and bathwater. The Green Belt should be protected under the new planning policy but we must remain vigilant and make sure that we don't see development nibbling at its edges. We will be studying the new legislation and will review its effects in coming Newsletters.

JUDITH CLOUSTON

FRESH VISION FOR NEGLECTED SITE

Those members of the Barnet Society who attended this years AGM in Pennefather Hall would have passed the old flint faced school building adjacent to Christ Church in St Albans Road. Since the school closed in the 1950s the site, valuable for its playground parking as well as its buildings, has functioned as a Red Cross centre, but has now stood empty and prone to vandalism for several years. However a bold new initiative promises both to restore the fabric and develop within it much needed services for older members of the community. The idea comes from Christ Church whose members already run a range of activities for this age group: lunches, weekly meetings and an annual week long holiday club for those most in need of a break but unable to leave their homes. Demand for these services already exceeds supply and the establishment of purpose built facilities on the school site will greatly expand the capacity and range of what is offered. Although the Church is taking the lead, the intention is to “offer practical help, activities, companionship, joy and hope, especially to older members of the community in a welcoming and secure environment – with an open door to everyone.”





Adjacent to the school is this war memorial from the Boer War

Clearly such a major project will require considerable financial support. The Open Door Appeal which is tasked with the fund raising is a registered charity and has already secured in excess of £220,000 towards the £800,000 needed to purchase the property and effect essential repairs. Longer term another £700,000 will be needed to reconfigure the interior and restore the historic façade.

We will follow the progress of this imaginative venture with interest as it breathes new life into a building which is very much part of the townscape in this part of Barnet at a time when other landmark features – most notably the Court House on Barnet Hill – are disappearing.

Further information on the scheme can be obtained from:

Christ Church Parish Office, St Albans Road, EN5 4LA

or from the website: www.opendoorappeal.co.uk.

JOHN GARDINER



BARNET SOCIETY GARDEN PARTY

Saturday 10th September 3-5pm

By kind invitation of Barbara Rossiter

Arkley Lodge

80 Barnet Road

Arkley EN5 3HA

(opposite Quinta Drive - plenty of parking)

RSVP <vice-chairman @barnetsociety.org.uk

or 020 8364 8644



BARNET TRADERS ASSOCIATION

Our town centre is struggling and we are trying very hard to do something about it. Chairing Barnet Traders Association is not an easy task. There is just so much to do! For starters, I do hope that you have all been to the High Street and purchased several lottery tickets. The idea of a local lottery came from a delightful Hadley Wood resident. We thought that it was such a good idea that we set about putting it together and in no time our very first lottery was launched. This, the first time, the prize money of £250 is guaranteed by the Traders Association but next time if all goes well the prize money could be far greater. All we need to do is sell lots of tickets. We have issued 4,000 of them so if you haven't already done so, please buy some and ask all your friends, relatives, and colleagues to buy some too!

You may have noticed the addition of some hanging baskets adding some much needed colour in the High Street. We are delighted to announce that several traders and businesses have been kind enough to sponsor some of them and of course if you are feeling generous you could sponsor a basket or two as well. Just contact me.

We would like to thank the following for their generous sponsorship:-

Wilkinson Chemist

Savoro Restaurant

Spizzico Restaurant

HOB Hair salon

The Spires Shopping Centre

MHHP Law

I don't know if you have heard but the Mayor of London has announced a £50,000,000 lottery bid for all outer London boroughs not benefiting from either Crossrail or the 2012 Olympics. Together with other local stakeholders, Hadley Residents Association and Barnet Residents Association (BRA), the Barnet Society has spent many hours preparing the bid on behalf of High Barnet. The Council have to act as conduit and bank for the bid and it is they who will be carrying out much of the work if we succeed! The bid was submitted on Monday July 19th so please keep all your fingers and toes crossed that we win. The results will be announced in mid-August at which time if successful, together with the Council, we will be able to issue a press release. So make a date to look at our website as we will announce the result

for you all there, and if we don't win this time there will be a second round later on in the year so all will not be lost.

And finally there are plans afoot for a Christmas Fayre again this year. We want to make it an event to be proud of. If you have any ideas or suggestions, know of anyone who is willing to put up some sponsorship money (it could be you) or can recommend anyone who has a cottage industry and might like an opportunity to sell their wares, please do let me know.

Anyway I am inclined to ramble on so for the moment, have a wonderful summer and let's hope for some late summer sunshine.

GAIL

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT NOTES

Judith, in her Chair's letter, reports upon Barnet Market, The Spires, the potential development of the Marie Foster Home site on Wood Street and the redevelopment of the Barnet Countryside Centre. What else?

A planning application is under consideration by the Council for the demolition and redevelopment of Barnet Court House, just up the hill from the tube station. The proposed replacement is a 3 and 4-storey building, somewhat similar in style to the recently developed Compton House a few doors further up, with shops on the ground floor and flats above.



The proposed building, spanning the full width of the site, would be almost twice the height and three times the bulk of the existing building and dominate the view from Barnet Hill. An attempt last year to have the existing building listed was declined by English Heritage on the grounds that it has insufficient architectural merit. It is, nevertheless, the most attractive building in the lower part of the High Street – or could be if restored. 79 objections to the current application (including one from the Barnet Society and several from its individual members) have been registered on the Council’s web site and it is likely that the current application will be refused on design grounds. If so, a revised application will inevitably follow and we can only hope that it will be for something more sympathetic to its surroundings in scale and architectural style – as we have called for in our objection letter. We would dearly love it if consent for demolition were refused but the chances of this are slim.



One component of the Town Centre Strategy that has escaped the Council’s axe is a planning brief for the Territorial Army site in St Albans Road. There are no immediate proposals for its redevelopment but, with government asset sales very much on the agenda, it is felt that the MoD might well put the site up for sale and the purpose of the planning brief is to have a formally adopted document that will greatly strengthen the Council’s ability to resist unsuitable development. The Core Group of local stakeholders and the Council are agreed that the last thing we want is a massive Asda, Morrisons or Tesco landing here to draw trade away from our already-struggling town centre. The Core Group has provided its views to the Council. We have said that we’d like to see the site designated for housing; and mainly for family housing, not

flats - of which High Barnet and New Barnet already has a surfeit. Any flats that are included should be at the northern end, backing on to the commercial premises at the top end of the High St, already three storeys high; alternatively on the St Albans Road perimeter which is less attractive for family housing. The three footpaths bounding the site should be opened up so that they are overlooked in some way by homes and therefore feel safer. Parking is inevitably a problem and developers should propose parking solutions that avoid the site looking like a car park! No buildings in excess of three stories. A planning brief cannot dictate architectural style but we have said that we would prefer brick and cohesive – but not uniform – style. We wait to see whether the Council will endorse our wishes.

Getting planning briefs like this adopted by the Council has become all the more important in light of the government's new (draft) National Planning Policy Framework which states: "At the heart of the planning system is a presumption in favour of sustainable development... Local planning authorities should plan positively for new development, and approve all individual proposals wherever possible." Councils should "approve development proposals that accord with statutory plans without delay; and grant permission where the plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date."

So no consideration, it seems, as whether the form of the proposed development is judged to be desirable/acceptable; only whether or not it breaches restrictions on development previously laid down in an adopted plan. If a clear and detailed policy has not been adopted by the time a planning application arrives, anything goes.

At least the NPPF does recognise that this total free-for-all should not apply in the Green Belt, stating "A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt" (before listing some exceptions). So we in High Barnet at least have the comfort that when, as a consequence of inadequately prescriptive LBB planning policies, our town is flooded with new inappropriate development, there should still be some nearby countryside for us to escape to.

DEREK EPSTEIN

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

We are pleased to welcome Mr P Ridgewell, Mr C Smith and Mr and Mrs G Nichols as members of the Barnet Society.

My thanks to all who have paid the new, higher annual subscription and a prompt to those who have still to do so. Thus far about 20% of members have chosen to pay by standing order, though the electronic transfer payment option has been very much less popular. Once again many people have generously paid above the requested sum and for this we are most grateful.

JOHN GARDINER

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

BARNET SOCIETY GARDEN PARTY

Saturday 10th September 2011 3pm - 5pm

Please see page 7 and ensure you RSVP to Gail

PLANNING UPDATE

Thursday 3rd November at 7.30pm

Judith Clouston

Venue to be announced.

TOTTERIDGE/MILL HILL WALK

December – date and starting point in the next Newsletter.

BARNET HIGH STREET CHRISTMAS FAIR

Sunday 4th December 2011

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