**THE BARNET SOCIETY**

**February Forum**

**At Pennefather Hall St Albans Road**

**22nd February ‘18**

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| **1****2****Con****Green** **Ind**  **Lib Dem****Lab****Floor****Floor** **Lab****Con****Floor****Con****Green****Lib Dem****Ind** **Lab****Hall** **Con****Green****Lab****Ind****Hall****Con** **Lib Dems****Lab****Green****Ind****Hall****Lab****Con****Lib Dems** **Con****Hall****1****2****3****Lab****Lib Dems****Ind****Green****Cons****Hall****1****2** **3** **4**  **5** **Lab****Lib Dems****Ind****Green****Cons** | **WELCOME**Robin Bishop Chair of the Barnet Society welcomed everyone both members & non- members and encouraged those not already members to join.He explained there were 13 candidates from High Barnet, Underhill & Oakleigh Wards - 5 Labour, 3 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 Greens and 1 Independent This was an opportunity to ask questions on housing, transport and the town centre before the election on 3rd May ‘18. Nick Jones would be moving around with a microphone so you can ask questions.The candidates then introduced themselves.- apologies from Cllr Tim Roberts**HOUSING**Robin Bishop said Barnet had a target of delivering 27,000 new homes by 2025 mainly in West of the Borough & are likely to meet this target. In 2016 the population of our patch was around 47,500 and nearly 1,400 new homes are expected to be approved by planners by 2025.The Mayor of London proposes to increase Barnet’s annual target by one third – so our wards could expect another 1,900 homes by 2025. This totals 3,300 homes roughly 5 more Brook Valley Gardens which could be 8,000 new residents.The Mayor of London’s draft London Plan proposes to abolish current limits on density of new developments including garden infill within half a mile of transport hubs this would include almost the whole of our 3 wards up to and including Whalebones & Hadley HighstoneAs sites become more difficult to develop in the rest of Barnet developers will be drawn to our area and the Council are beginning to revise our Local Plan so it is vital they introduce some controls which the newly elected Councillors must ensure they take responsible action..**Questions****How many properties in Barnet are unoccupied and what are the Council going to do about it?****Concerned about the Green Belt – Are there plans to build on it like Elmbank?**Conservatives are aware there are a lot of empty properties and they are considering increasing Council Tax on void properties which is done elsewhere.Elmbank was a brown field site and they will oppose any Green Belt developmentVoids -No figures available for this area but 2,800 in Borough in 2011 and 3,400 now.- West Hendon had to decant 143 tenants but they were told they could not use these vacant propertiesGreens would defend the Green Belt, parks and all open spaces.Empty houses and empty shops are criminalVoids – They would use Council’s existing powers to take action but it is often difficult to find the landlordsGreen Belt – Concerned about over development and poor quality schemes. Need to ensure the Council achieve a high quality developmentGreen Belt – They would not build on the Green Belt and they opposed the scheme at Elmbank where they wanted affordable housingVoids – New builds are not occupied because they are too expensive. They would look at increasing void rates and CPO’sPeople owning 2nd homes will not be put off by an increase in rates.**Question****Ark Academy** **- Why was this scheme approved? Why was the traffic survey carried out in August !!!!!- Why could it not have been a small school for Special needs?.**Labour said they had asked for a Special Needs SchoolBarnet did not own the land – Labour sold the site to the Football Club for £200,000 and they in turn sold it to the Dept of Education who have leased it to the Ark Academy. **Question****Barnet spent £200 M on Housing Benefit and incentives to private landlords for them to house homeless families. This is not good use of the rates. - The Government should reverse Right to Buy and we need to build more social housing not affordable housing – this was cheered by all.** The Council has a statutory duty to house homeless people under Sect 24 and we need to build more social housing.The Greens asked the London Mayor to ballot existing tenants if the Council want to regenerate a scheme – Now in London Plan Also can apply for grants for Self- Build Groups and they favour refurbishing a property rather than demolishing & rebuilding.Trying to pause RTB. The Council should specify a larger percentage of affordable housing on every development and should build social council housing.Agrees there should be more social housing and more affordable housing so young people born and bred in Barnet can live in the Borough.Housing Benefit bill has increased by 118% because more homeless people are housed by private landlords and most RTB properties are let out by private landlords to house same homeless people at much higher rents.Under the current regeneration schemes Barnet will lose 800 properties which will need replacing. There needs to be a better definition of affordable housing which is mainly 80% market rent but there should be a definite percentage of social housing which is 30% market rent on every new scheme. **Question****All agree there is a need for social housing but who is going to pay for it? Developers do not want social housing as it makes the scheme less profitable.**The Albert Road Gas Works was bought by a large Housing Association who will build larger properties for the private market and use the profits to build Social Housing Self- Build Schemes are the answer can get a grant and learn a tradeThe Developer will have to agree to build 50% affordable rent or they do not get permission. This includes both affordable housing (80% market rent) and social housing (30% market rent). This has been achieved in Islington Labour will build 800 homes for people decanted from W Hendon, Dollis Valley & Graham ParkCouncil should consider pre-fabricated buildings.**TRANSPORT**Robin Bishop outlined the current situation where in our 3 wards the average household had 1.2 cars in 2011 and 455 of all trips were by car or motorbike. The draft London Plan aims to reduce this by 20% by 2041. In support of this Barnet Planners often refuse to allow new housing close to transport hubs to build any parking spaces at all.The Mayor of London wants to encourage sustainable transport such as public transport, cycling or walking. Currently in Barnet this is 55% and the Mayor is aiming for 80%. About third of trips are on foot, 1.6% in H Barnet cycle to work, 1% in Underhill and 0.8% in Oakleigh.Many young people and elderly rely on buses but the routes do not connect with schools, hospitals or into Hertfordshire. The 3 rail stations do not connect well with existing bus services and the Mayor’s intention to build high density schemes around transport hubs will not be welcome without improvements to rail, bus, car and bike travel.We need a proper integrated transport system such as the proposed West London Orbital Railway linking Brent Cross with Mill Hill East, Finchley Central, Finsbury Park and possible Gospel Oak – Barking line. Consider hopper buses or trams or light railway connecting H.Barnet, E Barnet with Chase Farm hospital & Enfield or Barnet General with Edgware?**Question****Questioner lives in Potters Road and if Station Road or A1000 near Everyman cinema is closed then there is a huge bottleneck with traffic diverted down the very small Potters Road – He asked who is responsible for making these decisions in an emergency.**TfL are responsible and are extremely difficult to work with. He has met TfL on numerous occasions to consider a hopper bus from the station to the hospital, move 236 to finish at hospital instead of church. Have 107 or 307 stop at Arkley as they used to but the answer is always the same it would cost quarter million pounds for each one and they can’t afford it. Trams turned round at the church so buses do to!!Northern line trains have been cut - more now go to Edgware and Mill Hill East and the new trains which were promised have been cancelled..Lots of issues – will be a million extra cars per day in London if no action taken. Should encourage more walking and cycling perhaps have a cycling Tsar to visit schools& businesses. Should be cycle networks including along the A1000. The relationship with TfL should be better as the London Mayor is Labour. Would like to extend the lower emission zone proposed by the London Mayor and will put electric charging points in the Borough. Would encourage cycling.Need a long term solution to congestion and discourage people from coming to Barnet.Used to be a shuttle bus between Chase Farm and Barnet Hospital for nurses etc. but no longer exists. Roads around Salisbury Road get gridlocked if there is a major accident emergency services cannot get through because the roads are so narrow.**Question** **There seems to be ever expanding CPZ’s . Barnet Hospital in particular causes loads of parking problems.**CPZ around hospital was lobbied for by people living near the hospital. Labour represents the people and cannot ignore complaints. They had 3 consultations and the people living in the zone will decide the times it operates. Aim of Labour is to improve quality of life not raise money.In Westminster parking money is spent on roads and it raises £60M per year from fines and charges in Barnet it raises about £6M and again it is spent on roads. Barnet policy is to consider CPZ’s when it is led by residents who start the ball rolling. Hospital CPZ residents put forward a proposal now trying to extend it to roads that initially did not want it but realise traffic will spread to their roads when parking is limited on neighbouring roads. Investigating whether the Hospital has a legal responsibility for the people visiting their hospital. Also could consider a 2 storey car park on existing site at the hospital.CPZ’s do not solve the problem it just moves it elsewhere and reduces the amount of parking.**FUTURE OF BARNET TOWN CENTRE**Robin Bishop said Barnet High Street and New Barnet were 2 of 15 town centres in Barnet and as everyone knows town centre shopping is in decline, Between 2013 & 2016 High Barnet lost 1% shops, New Barnet 5% and Golders Green 12%.- betting shops have increased by 7%, convenience stores 8%, restaurants 14% and cafes 23%,Planners in Barnet are expecting to build new homes in town centres 250 in High Barnet and 600 in New Barnet by 2026 which is only a quarter needed to meet the Mayor of London’s target. But our town centres still need new offices, affordable workspaces & other businesses.There are 2 local planning guidance documents - The Chipping Barnet Town Centre Strategy and the New Barnet Town Centre Framework but neither say much about housing density. High Barnet has 2 Conservation Areas at each end of the High Street which gives it some protection but they only cover about a third of the Strategy Area so if the London Plan goes through the rest could be developed at a much higher density.Pavement Build outs & other improvementsThe original proposals have been revised to take account of some resident’s objections and on Monday 19th February the Area Committee agreed the funding for detailed design to proceed. We had intended to consult with everyone this Spring and carry out the works in the Summer but this now looks a bit optimistic. The Town Team will meet next week to discuss how to proceed.D Longstaff was at the meeting of the Area Committee and felt more positive - he said the proposals had been agreed and a study funded. On 5th or 6th May following the election consultation could start and if in favour it will go back to Committee and could start work in September.**Questions****How serious are the Council about boosting Town Centres? They are not kept clean and questioner understood street cleaning will stop at week-ends and the Street Manager had been got rid of.****We have 7 opticians and lots of Charity shops how can we attract local individual shops like 89 or craft shops like Hobbycraft to use the empty properties?****Fern Room – This is to be redeveloped currently used by Old Peoples Welfare where are the old people to go?**Labour are very serious about boosting the Town Centre – Will take strong action against fly tipping and will pick up 5 large items per year for free from people homesThey want 30 minutes free parking in the High Street and would arrange to have a small Business Forum. Mill Hill have been very successful in retaining their town centre and they will be contacted to see how this was achieved.Need to make the High Street a nicer place with trees, seats and wider pavementsIncubate business rates to encourage new/small businesses. Create a new Town Centre Management Role. Support the initiative for pavement buildouts, trees, seats and healthier streets. Need a policy for empty shops force the Council to take action if shop is empty for 3 months then break in The High Street is dirty it needs better enforcement, stall visas and signage should be improved generally but also where Car Parks are and the number of empty spaces indicated.Street Cleaning – Need to pay more. Shops are closing due to on line shopping and these empty shops should be used for local industry. Free Parking is good but if already full then it will not help the situation. Concerned about widening the pavements because you need free space so ambulances can get through.He will find out about the proposal to change the street cleaning at the week-ends. There is a shortage of money but agrees the environment is important. 45 people were charged with littering in High Barnet last year so some action is taken.Fern Room – The Developer has to provide a community room as part of their proposals. Barnet Museum is important to Barnet Town Centre when the studies about the Battle are complete and the Physic Well is also important. These must be promoted.**Question**s**It was suggested empty shops be turned into hubs and the theatre should be expanded and used more and turn the High Street into a modern place for young people.****Create more recreational facilities – Got rid of the football ground and now QE Girls have closed the swimming pool and other communal facilities to the general public. Has the Council any powers to stop these closing which have been closed on Health & Safety grounds? Clubs have used them for 30 years and they were shut down at short notice.****Library – Staffed Hours have reduced and children can no longer visit on their own when it’s un- staffed****Can the quality of the air be improved caused by the massive number of lorries using the High Street.?****Shops are closing because the business rates are so high. Starbucks closed because rates were £53,000 pa.**Labour will be more hands on working with local businessesThey will keep more Council Services in- house and all employees will be paid the London Living Wage Outsourcing to Capita was about saving money especially pension costs but Labour would prefer to bring it back in house so it would be in their control. Capita do not have local knowledge. They will look at the contract and make sure they do what they are contracted to do.Library – campaigned against the cuts and will work to re-instate them and have them staffed for more hours.Street cleaning will find out more about the proposals Wellbeing – Will provide better public health such as gymns and using school facilities but QE Girls is now an Academy so do not have to be part of the community.Libraries should be a hub and one of the reasons to come to Barnet and children must be able to visit on their own.Capita have a huge democratic deficit but we are stuck with these contracts.QE Girls - they will try to bring these services back for the community and they agree there is a pollution problem on the High Street.Agreed Services should be in- sourced – local services by local people. Money should be allocated to the library. The High Street needs help to make the transition to an attractive location and lorries should be restricted.There should be a consultation to increase the Low Emission Zone perhaps from the M25 inwards. If people cannot park they do not go to the shops. They too would bring the services back in- house.Capita saves £12M per year so to bring it back in- house would cost £1M per month on the rates. Labour voted for Capita and read the contract before agreeing.The Bull Theatre is trying to build a repertory theatre.Library – they will be increasing the opening hours and have increased the number of books. They have also spent £14M building two new libraries in the BoroughQE Girls will lose the rental income closing down these facilities which will have a financial impact - he will look into what has happened.A new Leisure Centre is being built in New Barnet at a cost of £50MThe Teenage Market will be up and running from Easter and he hopes it will be well supported throughout the Summer.**CONCLUSION**Robin Bishop said he would like to leave two messages with the Candidates.Please consult us residents properly, we are either ignored, insufficiently informed or restricted to commenting on matters that have already been decided.Let’s have a new Local Plan for Barnet that strikes a sensible balance between protecting the best of what we’ve got and recognising that some change is inevitable. Do not leave it to the Mayor of London or the developers. The Barnet Society looks forward to participating in this process and if people in the Hall are not members please join us.Both Robin Bishop and Nick Jones thanked everyone for coming and hoped they enjoyed the evening.Aubrey Rose, President of the Barnet Society thanked the Committee members for organising the event and thanked everyone for coming and contributing.  |