

THE Barnet Society

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LATEST: 1 Sunset View appeal is dismissed

A Planning Inspector has ruled that alterations to this house in the Monken Hadley Conservation Area, in defiance of Council enforcement orders, must be reversed.



The decision sends a message to developers to respect planning law, and vindicates years of **Barnet Society** campaigning to protect the building and CA. It will be covered fully in our next issue.

VICTORIA VICTORY, AGAIN!

A second attempt to get approval for an enlarged development of blocks of flats on the former gas works site at New Barnet has been refused by the Council, writes Nick Jones.

And for now, Barnet's largest brownfield site will continue to remain unused.

Developers Fairview and One Housing met an almost impenetrable wall of opposition as they argued the case for building 539 flats.

Their proposal was for a total of 13 separate blocks of flats of four to seven storeys in height – a scheme described as an “insult” to New Barnet and entirely out of character with a neighbourhood of two and three storey Victorian and Edwardian houses.

The latest 539-flat scheme was a reduction from the 651 flats proposed – and rejected – in 2020 but was still way more than the plan for 371 flats that was originally agreed in 2015. The developers had been urged to accept the latter plan.

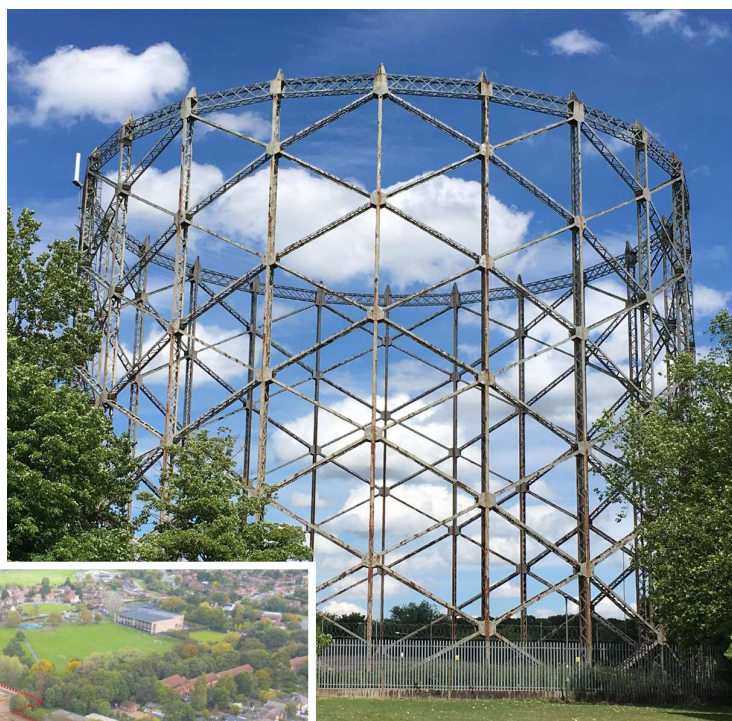
More than 800 residents in

the area had objected to the revised scheme in support of the Save New Barnet campaign and all but one of the councillors on Barnet Council's strategic planning committee voted against the plan.



Barnet's planning officers had recommended approval of the revised plan for the former gas works site, which lies between the main railway line at New Barnet and Victoria Recreation Ground, and which would be known as the Victoria Quarter.

The new plan proposed a reduction in both the height of blocks and their density, and with a 20-metre gap between the blocks, which would provide



▲ The landmark gasometer in New Barnet, which, separately, owner National Grid wants to develop. (Left) an aerial view of the site with the boundary marked out in red

more daylight between the buildings; this had been one of the reasons for refusal in 2020.

Any thought of the Council's agreeing to the scheme was immediately shot down by John Dix, representing the New Barnet Community Association, who said he spoke on behalf of many of the 800 objectors.

The local community had worked with the developers who devised the 2015 scheme for

371 flats but Fairview and One Housing were trying to increase the development way beyond what was acceptable, with far more studio and one-bedroom flats while reducing those with three or four bedrooms – when it was three-and-four-bedroom homes that New Barnet wanted most of all.

Nick Hufton, a New Barnet resident, and a residential design

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architect, said that in their attempt to squeeze so many homes on the site, 50 per cent of the flats would face the railway line, and needing non-opening windows because of the noise and necessitate cooling systems to reduce overheating in summer.

“This scheme flies in the face of the wishes of local residents... these blocks are entirely out of character with what is predominantly a Victorian

suburb of two and three storey houses.”

Several councillors added their condemnation to what they said was the “shameful” way the developers were proposing to put the affordable homes next to the railway line, which would require cooling units and mean extra cost for the tenants.

MP Theresa Villiers acknowledged that the height of the blocks had been reduced from ten storeys to seven, but it was still an overdevelopment of

the site, and the bulk and mass of the new buildings would be detrimental to the area.

Anne Clarke, councillor and GLA member, said there was a “well-supported” approved scheme that could be started straight away.

[However,] “the latest plan rips apart the strong input of the community and provides lower-quality housing”.

But Mark Jackson, Fairview’s director of planning, indicated that the developers were

standing their ground. They had changed the plans from the 2020 scheme by reducing the massing, density, and height of the blocks, and they had also widened the space between the blocks which would increase daylight in the flats. He said the 2015 scheme for 371 flats was “not deliverable” as far as Fairview were concerned on the grounds that the cost of decontaminating the site had exceeded expectations and necessitated a higher density.

‘Hideous’ plan turned down

Earlier, the planning committee voted unanimously to reject a scheme to add two extra floors to the former Whetstone office block, Barnet House, so that it could be converted into flats.

Despite the decision, the developers Meadow Residential have already exercised a right of appeal.

They want to convert Barnet House into a complex that will include a new six-storey rear extension to provide a total of 260 flats.

One objection was over the impact the redevelopment would have on the adjacent Baxendale Court care home. The proposed extension would have a dominating effect on the home and its 45 residents.

Council members lined up to denounce the scheme. Councillor Tom Smith said adding two floors to what was an already “hideous” building was disproportionate and it would tower over Whetstone.

Councillor Richard Cornelius said planning permission should never have been given in the first place for Barnet House and adding to its height and turning



the building over to flats would create a “blot on the landscape” of Whetstone and Totteridge.

MP Theresa Villiers said that Barnet House was already an eyesore that could be seen across her Chipping Barnet constituency. “Making it even taller – from 12 storeys to 14 – is excessive and an overdevelopment.”

A similar scheme to turn Barnet House into flats had been refused in 2018. She said this fresh application, which would increase the number of flats from 216 to 260 while reducing the number of affordable homes, should also be rejected.

“Barnet House is already ugly and oppressive and making it even bigger would be a bizarre thing to do.”

Postscripts

Victoria Quarter & Barnet House

Robin Bishop writes

VICTORIA QUARTER

Due to the size of the development it will have to be referred to the Mayor of London for final determination, and he could still overturn the Council’s decision. However, he chose not to with Fairview’s very similar planning application in 2020. Fairview could also appeal to the Planning Inspectorate against the decision.

BARNET HOUSE

The developer of Barnet House has already appealed to the Planning Inspectorate, and the Barnet Society has submitted a representation supporting the Council’s refusal of the application. While we agree that the proposal is an unattractive overdevelopment of the site, we also object to the treatment of the existing building.

We don’t often disagree with Theresa Villiers MP on planning matters, but we dispute that Barnet House is ‘ugly and unattractive’.

It is a relatively intact – though neglected – building by Richard Seifert & Partners, leading commercial architects of the 1960s and 70s.

There has been an upsurge of interest in their work recently, and examples such as Centre Point and the NatWest Tower have been nationally listed.

While not on a par with those, Barnet House has several features in common with them, notably its dramatic Corbusian ‘pilotis’ and its Goldfingersque open parapet. These add sculptural quality and grace at street level and at a distance.

Barnet House is a rare survival of a style of architecture that has become increasingly fashionable, has historical interest and deserves better than to be obscured by a crude makeover.