



CHIPPING BARNET COMMUNITY PLAN

Barnet Society response to public consultation on draft CBC Plan dated January 2021

18 February 2021

To: Ashleigh Watkins, LB of Barnet
Architecture 00
Cllr David Longstaff, Chair of Chipping Barnet Town Team
Bob Burstow, Secretary of Chipping Barnet Town Team

INTRODUCTION

The Barnet Society is a non-political organisation with over 600 members that seeks to influence local and central government on aspects of planning and the environment in and around the parliamentary constituency of Chipping Barnet.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft *Chipping Barnet Community Plan*. We congratulate Architecture 00's team on its willingness to listen to us and other stakeholders, their overall grasp of the issues facing the town centre, and on producing so many interesting – and sometimes imaginative and exciting – ideas for projects.

On publication of the draft *Plan*, we formed a group of Committee and other members with special interest in, and knowledge of, the town to review it and consider which five projects the Society should support. In doing so, we recognised that those chosen must have (1) a realistic prospect of raising funding or making a decent return on investment, and (2) commitment from groups or individuals to participate in the feasibility studies that will go ahead over coming months, and to champion them thereafter. We also consulted our online members, published a series of articles on our website and invited comments on our initial thoughts. On that basis of those responses and our group discussions:

1. We generally agree with the Key Principles of the *Plan*, though we have a few comments that are detailed below in KEY PRINCIPLES.
2. We wish to see a good variety of projects selected, for two reasons:
 - a. To represent the broad range of people with a stake in the *Plan*'s success.
 - b. Future funding will come with different aims or criteria, and we need to spread our net as widely as possible.
3. We have agreed five priority themes: something **old**, something **new**, something for **children**, something for **young people** and something **green**.
4. We would support 12 projects. They are listed below under each theme in EMERGING PROJECTS.

5. For each theme, we have identified a champion who would participate in steering groups and workshops over the course of the feasibility studies, report back to the Society, and co-ordinate our input. Other members of ours are also available with knowledge and willingness to contribute as and when called upon.
6. We have summarised our reasons in REASONS FOR OUR CHOICE.

KEY PRINCIPLES

We agree with the seven Principles, but 'We want to be proud of Chipping Barnet' – although uncontroversial – is a bit vague, unlike the others which are much more specific.

The Principles could be reduced in number. There is not much difference between 'We want our town centre to be a destination that is enjoyable to visit', 'We want more reasons to visit & stay in the town centre throughout the day, evening & week' and 'We want Chipping Barnet to be a vibrant, thriving place to live, work & visit'; perhaps they could be combined.

Finally, while certainly 'We want to actively be involved & invest in our town centre' in terms of time and energy, our Society does not have the funds to invest financially.

EMERGING PROJECTS

Something old

Barnet's identity is founded on its distinctive history and building heritage. We must draw the attention of more residents and potential visitors and investors to our existing assets.

Barnet Society champion:

Judith Clouston

Projects we support:

- **Routes & Riches Wayfinding** (but also covered in Something Green below)
- **Barnet Museum**
- **Opportunity Cluster: Historic Centre** (but also covered in Something Green below)

Something new

Economic regeneration of the town centre has got to be a major priority. Whether it is the revival of retail or attracting new business, without new stimulus nothing else will save it.

Barnet Society champion:

Gail Laser

Projects we support:

- **Town Centre Website/App**
- **High Street Incubator**
- **Co-working Space**

Something for children

The town centre must become more child-friendly. Only if families have reasons to go there that appeal to their children, not just to their parents' need to work or shop – and if they can get there safely and enjoyably – will it become important in their lives.

Barnet Society champion:
Simon Watson

Projects we support:

- **Play Masterplan**
- **Walking & Cycling Quiet Routes**
- **Safer Road Junctions**

Something for young people

Our teenagers and young adults could be among the greatest casualties of Covid-19, in terms of qualifications, employment, health and wellbeing. The *Plan* must offer them something, for example vocational pathways, work experience, leisure – and hope.

Barnet Society champion:
Susan Skedd

Projects we support:

- **The Bull Theatre**
- **Teenage Makers**

Something green

Barnet has precious green open spaces, mature woodlands, streams and wetlands. Last year brought home what we stand to lose with climate change and bad building development. Surely this is the moment to invest in green initiatives.

Barnet Society champion:
Robin Bishop

Projects we support:

- **Routes & Riches Wayfinding** (but is also covered in Something Old above)
- **Rewilding**
- **Opportunity Cluster: Historic Centre** (but is also covered in Something Old above)

REASONS FOR OUR CHOICE

Something old

Routes & Riches Wayfinding

This project could result in a series of specially-commissioned maps, signs or markers to highlight the locations of our many places of historical and architectural interest, as well as significant buildings such as Barnet & Southgate College and the Hospital. It would also draw attention to our many green spaces in or close to the town centre, for example Whitings Hill – from where the best views of our Green Belt can be seen – or King George's Fields, where free blackberries grow within 10 minutes' walk of the High Street.

Barnet Museum

We fully support the Museum's identified need to expand capacity to host visitors and increase its educational offer, whilst strengthening connections to its surroundings and Old Courthouse Park. Additional exhibition space is required to display the burgeoning collection of historical artefacts from the Battle of Barnet and findings from the ongoing archaeological

investigations. Additional space is also required for increased school/college visits and evening lectures, and will include wheelchair access/facilities. Such a project is tangible, achievable and directly responds to six of the seven Key Principles (and will positively contribute to the seventh).

The Society previously assisted the Museum in making a planning application for a proposed two-storey (plus basement) extension to the rear of the existing building, but this was refused, principally on grounds of loss of open space in the park. We support a new feasibility study to look at exciting new proposals, to justify use of the Museum Garden for such an extension and to form the basis for fundraising for a new building.

Opportunity Cluster: Historic Centre

The historic centre of the town, focussing on St John the Baptist's Church, contains a number of historic assets including Tudor Hall, the Museum and the Mitre public house as well as complementary civic uses such as The Bull Theatre, Barnet & Southgate College and Old Courthouse Park. However, it is currently dominated by traffic, especially when approaching up Barnet Hill.

An emerging project idea is to improve the appearance and safety of the main junction through widening and greening – an idea that The Barnet Society has been pushing for many years. It will also look at further enhancing Church Passage, improving access to College Square and Old Courthouse Park, making more of the various restaurants on offer and promoting events. This will make the historic heart a more welcoming place for those who live and work here and will draw in more visitors.

Cherishing the existing historic buildings is also inherently sustainable. Their environmental performance needs improving without destroying their character, but knowledge exists to do that. It would also retain the massive amounts of embodied carbon locked up in their fabric.

Something new

Town Centre Website/App

Moving forward we need enforceable, stylish shop front design, business engagement, perhaps with a business and traders' organisation supporting each other and engaging with online promotions, events and a new local delivery service, that will help to create a thriving town centre. Add to this collective branding and identity and a professional website or app and we will have the right ingredients for the future success of Chipping Barnet:

High Street Incubator & Co-working Space

During this pandemic we have had to change how we live and work, and this has fed through to how we use our local spaces. Many of us will continue to work from home but need somewhere to get together in or near the High Street. There is also a great opportunity to open much needed affordable workspace in an empty unit or vacant space, perhaps with a crèche and café, and there is growing interest in co-working spaces.

Something for children

Play Masterplan

Much is being made about the damaging – and potentially long-lasting – consequences of Covid-19 for children not able to go to school. Less is said about their loss of opportunities to play outdoors and to socialise with other children and adults across the generations. Yet

educational research and practice has proved the fundamental importance to children's development of interaction with people and the environment from the earliest years.

Appropriate improvements to Old Courthouse Park, and also play facilities in other parts of the town centre, should provide new types of play-space, more varied, nature-inspired and appropriate to children of different ages and abilities. It should also include provisions for older children and young teens in the form of more challenging play, preferably linked to a youth club with opportunities for enterprise, work experience, extra-curricular lessons for art and the like.

Walking & Cycling Quiet Routes

In order for children and families to reach the town centre, pleasant Walking & Cycling Quiet Routes would make their journey healthier and more enjoyable. Only a couple of generations ago, Meadway was a country lane much used by residents of New Barnet walking to market. Today, a less-travelled but lovelier route can be followed across King George's Field, and with an all-weather path it would be practicable and fun for children, as well as elders and less-abled.

High Barnet also needs better provision for cyclists. It should not be too difficult or costly to construct a separate cycleway parallel to the A1000 up Barnet Hill, under the canopy of 'Lee's Trees'. Once at the top of the hill, cycling is fairly easy, especially on the side roads. But in places such as Hadley Green and Common new cycleways would be more pleasurable, and enable younger cyclists to acquire confidence.

Safer Road Junctions

For children, as well as for pedestrians and cyclists of all ages, safer junctions are vital. We know, from the success of the recent High Street pavement widening, that pedestrian crossings can be narrowed without significant detriment to traffic. Another opportunity, the High Street/Wood Street junction is described in **Opportunity Cluster: Historic Centre** above.

Something for young people

The Bull Theatre

The Bull Theatre has been a valued but underused resource in Chipping Barnet in the past. The *Plan* project is not intended to alter SETS' core educational role, though if successful, SETS would certainly benefit. It is partly about taking school performances out to local schools and other audiences. It is also about attracting the community into its building, particularly its auditorium, to engage in a range of educational and enjoyable activities at times of day, evening or weekend when it would otherwise be empty.

SETS has expertise in, and passion for, the creative and expressive aspects of the curriculum that research shows are invaluable to the development of children and young adults, but for which mainstream schools are often unable or unwilling to provide. Lockdown has made us aware of how important the arts are for all of us. Whether as participants or audiences, our mental health and wellbeing depends on them to some degree.

Teenage Makers

Teenage Makers, would build on the success of the Teenage Market that ran for two years pre-Covid on The Spires bandstand site. Partnership with Barnet & Southgate College, and possibly local secondary schools, would enable a programme of teaching and learning

through making and selling that could lead to formal qualifications, work experience, employment – and with luck, a new generation of entrepreneurs. This would also fit well with the government’s recent recognition that vocational education has in the past been undervalued and underfunded, and deserves better support in future.

A Teenage Makers market on the College’s square would also bring life to that attractive but underused space, and encourage staging of other public events there.

Something green

Routes & Riches Wayfinding (see Something Old above)

Rewilding

Over the last 25 years we have planted, and persuaded the Council to plant, many hundreds of trees and shrubs in and around the town centre. We have supported other local organisations active in conserving and enhancing the environment such as Green Beings and Barnet Environment Centre. And we have drawn attention to neglected corners that would benefit from better design and management, such as the pocket park between The Spires and the Stapylton Road bus-stop.

The strengths of this project are many. It would require relatively little to deliver: mainly seeds or saplings – which are cheap – and labour to find, prepare, plant and maintain new spaces. There is great and growing enthusiasm for planting among the public, and especially in schools, so much of the labour could be voluntary. It would produce results within a growing season or two, but could also be carried out in stages as money and enthusiasm allow. It would bring quiet satisfaction to those taking part, and to all the passers-by who enjoy the results, as well as opportunities for pollination, biodiversity and habitat creation.

Opportunity Cluster: Historic Centre (see Something Old above)