



The Barnet Society

Campaigning for a better Barnet

NEWSLETTER August 2010



Local 'Disabled' Parking

CHAIR'S LETTER

As I write this, there is much change in the air.

In May, we witnessed the advent of the new Coalition Government and have already seen the emergence of a number of significant new planning policies. (We will keep an eye on how these filter down to local level and affect issues in the area). The last few months have seen progress on the new Town Centre Strategy and the High Barnet Project (see below), the return of hanging baskets to the High Street and, in September, the new Barnet College will open its doors to students, bringing a huge number of young people back to Barnet High Street. The new building is a great improvement on the previous campus and will provide us with a new public open space in the heart of the town. Although it is still not clear how this space will be used, it will provide views of (and access to) a newly-restored Tudor Hall, giving a new emphasis to one of Barnet's oldest buildings.

The second draft of the Local Development Framework (LDF) was due to have been published in May, but was withdrawn by LB Barnet almost immediately. (We submitted comments on the first draft and await the revisions with interest - we understand that the revised draft will now be issued in the autumn).

The Barnet Society takes an active rôle and interest in all of these changes, arguing for higher standards of development and planning, better protection for our Green Belt and improved appearance of our surroundings. This Newsletter contains articles on a few of the above; there is much to discuss and we are keen to get your views. At our AGM in June, we also saw change with a new Committee being voted in and, for the first time in several years, we now have a full complement of Officers - which is good news, as there is much to do.

The fine weather that we have been enjoying of late has encouraged many of us out of our homes and into the great outdoors. We are very fortunate to be living in a town that has Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land surrounding almost three quarters of its perimeter. The presence of this 'green lung' provides beauty, amenity and valuable habitat for flora and fauna. Walking through the various woods, commons and meadows that surround our town is a delight at any time of year, but the last couple of months have been particularly lovely with magnificent trees and an abundance of grasses, wild flowers, birds and butterflies. The Barnet Society was founded in order to defend the Green Belt and we must remain vigilant - pressure to develop is a constant threat, in spite of the new Government's commitment to defend it.

We are very pleased, however, to be able to report that, in July, the new Secretary of State overturned a Planning Inspector's decision to allow the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange to go ahead at Radlett and that planning permission has consequently been refused.

If you haven't been for a walk in our beautiful Green Belt recently, then I urge you to do so. It is a mystery to me why so few people take advantage of what we have on our door step. If you are able, do get out there and enjoy it while the summer is still with us!

JUDITH CLOUSTON

HIGH STREET FLOWERS

We are greatly cheered to see the return of the hanging baskets to the High Street after many years without them. They certainly brighten up the place. They have been provided by Barnet College, who agreed to fund them for the current year as a gesture of good will to mark their return to the Wood Street campus in September. After that, we'll need to find another sponsor for the flowers (possibly with a touch-up to the paintwork for the stands?) – hopefully, through the High Barnet Project.

Thank you, Barnet College.



BARNET SOCIETY AGM 17th JUNE 2010

This year's AGM took place in June, and members voted in the new Committee. As mentioned above, for the first time in a number of years, we have a full complement of Officers (all of whom are women....!).

We are very pleased to welcome two new Committee members: Becky Glenister, who has agreed to be our new Honorary Secretary, and Derek Epstein who is taking over from David Lee as Chair of the Planning & Environment Committee. David retired from the Committee at the AGM and accepted the position of Vice President to mark his outstanding service to the Society over the last 15 years.

Penny Dye agreed to continue as Honorary Treasurer, Gail Laser agreed to be Vice Chair and I am delighted to be your new Chair. Our thanks go to my predecessor, Peter Willcocks, who stepped up to the mark and led us through the last couple of years and who will, I am pleased to say, continue to edit our Newsletter. The other Committee members are John Gardiner, our Membership Secretary, and Dennis Bird, who will continue to organise our ever-popular events, and last, but not least, Mary Rossiter, who provides an invaluable service as our Minutes Secretary. Alan Howells stood down this year, and we thank him for his years of service to the Society.

The AGM was admirably chaired by our President, Aubrey Rose, and was attended by members, including our newly-returned MP, Theresa Villiers. Theresa kindly took time out of her very busy schedule as Transport Minister to address the meeting and to respond to our guest speaker, John Cox, who gave a fascinating talk about the proposed North London Light Railway.

CHIPPING BARNET TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY BOARD

In the February Newsletter I explained that a new Chipping Barnet Town Centre Strategy Board (or CBTCB) had been set up to formulate a long-promised Town Centre Framework, or Strategy, to inform and guide improvements and future development in Chipping Barnet. At that point, we had only had one meeting and, whilst we were full of high hopes, there wasn't much to report in terms of output.

Since then we have had two more Strategy Board meetings, the last one being at the end of July. A Core Group, comprising representatives of the three residents associations (Barnet Society, Hadley Residents Association and Barnet Residents Association), the Barnet Traders Association, Waitrose, the Spires and The Old Bull Theatre School held a series of meetings between the Board meetings to discuss and debate our 'vision'. There have also been five

‘themed’ meetings, covering a number of key areas that came out of discussion at the second Board meeting. These were: Town Centre Character, Economy, Traffic & Parking, Public Realm and Arts & Culture. Representatives from other organisations were invited to attend the themed meetings including Barnet College, Barnet Museum, St John the Baptist Church, Metropolitan Police, English Heritage and Transport for London (TfL). Many hours and a great deal of talking, but little time to feed back to Barnet Society members - all five of the meetings took place during one month - so I held a meeting in July to bring people up to date and get initial comments.

The Strategy Board is now chaired by Dorne Kanareck (LBB Environment & Operations), following the very sudden departure of Dan Ashe, who took ‘early retirement’. The assistant who had been setting up the meetings and liaising with us all also departed suddenly, but this time to run away with the ‘love of her life’. Never a dull moment.... There are also a number of Council officers on the Board from Dorne’s department and from Planning, plus the Core Group and two new Ward Councillors: David Longstaffe from High Barnet Ward and Andrew Strongolou from Underhill.

The themed meetings produced action lists with many items that need to be explored further, including setting up a working party with TfL and LB Barnet Highways to look at a number of aspects of transport within the town centre. There is a new draft Strategy document which attempts to summarise information gathered from the meetings that have taken place so far. It is a great improvement on the initial ‘confidential’ draft produced earlier in the year, but still needs a lot more work. We requested a ‘soft’ copy to make comments on, but we also need more analysis and further diagrams to inform the outcome. So, we’re making progress but there’s still quite a way to go.

We have been putting forward ideas on behalf of the Barnet Society under each of the themed headings and working to produce the core Group’s ‘vision’. This has been arrived at following many hours of discussion and a great deal of agreement on the key issues. It is heartening to see how well we can work together and this is one of the most positive things to emerge from the exercise to date. The current vision statement reads as follows:

To make Chipping Barnet a vibrant destination town centre for local and surrounding communities - a place for all who live, work, shop and study here to be proud of.

This strategy will provide a framework for the future of the town centre which will protect what is best about Chipping Barnet and set parameters for high

quality expansion of what it has to offer. It will set out short and long term plans to achieve this vision which will include:

- *Respect for and celebration of the town's history*
- *Enlargement of the retail offer with the historic Barnet Market at its heart*
- *Enhancement of cultural and student activities centred around The Bull Theatre and Barnet College*
- *Provision of high quality public realm and improved appearance of the town centre*
- *Improved accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and shoppers through better parking and traffic management*

As the Council keep saying, this is a new initiative and this pilot project is the first in the Borough. It is very unusual, to say the least, that Council officers ask us what we want. This is a real opportunity and, although the arrangement for themed meetings (holding all 5 meetings in one month) was far from ideal, we remain generally positive about the outcome. The important thing is that you, too, have your say and, at our latest Board meeting in July, Dorne Kanareck suggested that an interim consultation with residents and local businesses should take place during September in order to get feedback from all involved. We're not sure of the timing yet, but I propose holding another open meeting at the end of September to explain what has been happening – if you'd like to know how you can influence the future of Chipping Barnet, do come along and/or e-mail me at: chairman@barnetsociety.org.uk. Thank you to all who have already contributed ideas and comments – these really matter and can make a difference, so please keep them coming! (see Events for details of the meeting).

THE HIGH BARNET PROJECT

You may have read about this in the local press. It is an initiative based on a similar idea in Crouch End which promotes the shops, restaurants and businesses in the area. The Council is providing some 'seed' finance to get the project going. It is being led by the Barnet Traders Association (BTA), a group that represents local businesses and traders. They have just appointed a Co-ordinator to run the project and plan to launch a website shortly. They have discussed a number of ideas such as late night shopping, reward cards, and special shopping events. To get an idea of what is possible, look at the Crouch End project's website www.thecrouchendproject.co.uk

It's an interesting idea and, if done well, and with conviction, could help promote our local businesses. There could also be an opportunity to link to

other websites and to promote local activities and events. It's taking a while to get going and needs the support of more traders, but could be very positive. It ties in with our efforts to maintain and improve Chipping Barnet as a thriving town in the face of ever-increasing competition from new supermarkets (yes, there's another 'local' one going in to the parade of shops opposite the Odeon), 24-hour superstores, out of town shopping centres (such as London Colney) and future developments, such as that proposed for Brent Cross. Much of the work that we've been doing with the Town Centre Strategy revolves around how to ensure the long-term health of our local economy.

We are keeping an interested eye on developments with the High Barnet Project and will let you know how things develop over the next few months.

CHIPPING OR HIGH BARNET?

There has been a good deal of discussion amongst the members of the Town Centre Strategy Board on the correct name for our town centre. Should it be Chipping or High? Some years ago, the Council erected signs at either end of the High Street, welcoming visitors to Chipping Barnet Town Centre. It has also entitled the Strategy 'Chipping Barnet', but there are many references to High Barnet, too. There are strong opinions about the names and, contrary to popular belief that the latter came into use following the arrival of the railway station, it appears they are both historic, with references to High Barnet appearing on maps from the sixteenth century. Chipping, of course, is earlier as it relates to the market, which was founded here in 1199 (Chipping, Chepyng or Cheaping). Interestingly, the Ordnance Survey shows Chipping Barnet as the area to the north of Wood Street and High Barnet as south. The parliamentary constituency is Chipping Barnet, but the local ward is High Barnet.

If we are going to 'brand' the town centre under the High Barnet Project (or should that be Chipping?), what should we call it? The local Conservation Area Advisory Committee backs Chipping Barnet, but at a meeting held about the Town Centre Strategy for members in July, our straw poll gave a result of exactly 50:50.

So, we'd like to hear from you – let us know what you think by e-mailing: chairman@barnetsociety.org.uk

JUDITH CLOUSTON

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

We are pleased to welcome all new members of the Society and especially those who have joined us in recent weeks, namely;

Mr and Mrs Glenister,	Mrs Y.R. Kelly,
J. Moles,	Ms J. Winsor,
Mr, Mrs, and Miss Vaz,	Mr M. Kentish.

We would encourage them, together with all our members to participate in the programme of events which are detailed elsewhere in this newsletter.

My thanks go to all who have paid the annual subscription and particularly to those who added a little extra. Such generosity helps hold the subscription at the minimum level, keeping membership open to as large a number of people as possible. Another way of making our financial resources stretch further is to have members pay the subscription on time without the need for a personal prompt at a later date. So please, if the green renewal form is still collecting dust on your desk or has been eaten by the dog, do send your cheque for £5(individual) or £8(household) to me as soon as possible. If you cannot remember whether or not you have paid, give me a call – 8440 3899 – and I shall be happy to resolve the uncertainty. We value all our members, but if we hear nothing from them we have reluctantly to remove their names from the membership list.

JOHN GARDINER

BARNET MARKET

Friends of Barnet Market mobilised the largest number of supporters thus far for the spring campaign to collect signatures for the petition calling for an improved surface. Both the traders and their customers have found the loose, black material presently used to be uncomfortable, dirty and potentially dangerous. Those with shopping trolleys or pushchairs find particular difficulty and reportedly, some older people, less steady on their feet, have given up coming to the Market .

Despite the strength of feeling demonstrated by well over 5000 signatories to the petition, the owners of the privately owned site show no sign of making the changes so clearly needed.

The Council remain firmly supportive of the Market and together with our MP Theresa Villiers are working to find a solution which will ensure its future into the long term.

New moves can be expected in the coming months as the original planning permission for the redevelopment of the Market site expires before the end of the year. This means that the owners will have to start work on their original scheme, apply for an extension of the existing permission, or submit completely new plans to the Council. Looks as if the log jam of recent years might finally be broken.

JOHN GARDINER

“THE GREAT WHITE CITY” Talk by Don Knight, 20th July 2010

Don gave us a fascinating and illustrated insight into a part of London history almost forgotten. We all know that Alexandra Palace and Earls Court became great exhibition venues in the late nineteenth century but I must admit to not knowing that the biggest of all was in a marshy bit on the edge of London called Shepherd’s Bush.

The origins of all this goes back to 1900 when the Prince of Wales went to the Paris Exhibition and came back very impressed. By 1901 he was King and wanted to have a joint Franco-British Exhibition. In 1904 The Entente Cordial was signed and by 1906 the Exhibition was planned. 140 acres of boggy farmland were bought at Shepherd’s Bush. 12,000 workers put up 100 exhibition buildings on the site. Don showed us several pictures of these huge Edwardian structures (“over the top” springs to mind!). In the middle was the 150ft. high flic flac – roughly equivalent to the London Eye.

The Exhibition opened in May 1908 and attracted 8.2 million visitors! Amongst other things was an Irish Village, big animals doing tricks, villages from various parts of the Empire and lots of water and boat rides. All the buildings were bright white, not usual in smoky London, hence the name “White City”. The organization had its own postcards and stamps and Don has a collection with some very evocative messages.

In 1908 The Olympic Games were due to be held in Italy but Vesuvius erupted so Britain and France were asked to hold the games alongside the Exhibition. The stadium constructed lasted until 1984 and GB won 58 gold medals!

The Olympic Stadium cost £75,000 to build. As an interesting aside, the marathon at the Olympics is 26 miles 385 yards because the 1908 marathon was due to finish on the other side of the stadium from the Royal Box. This was unacceptable to the Princess Alexandra due to be in attendance and hence the extra 385 yards which are still there!

In 1909 there was The Imperial International Exhibition, 1910 The Japan British Exhibition, 1911 The Coronation Exhibition, 1912 the Latin British

Exhibition and 1914 The Anglo American Exposition. All of these attracted between 6 and 8 million visitors.

During WW1 the site became an army recruiting centre and then fell into disrepair. In 1919 there was talk of holding a British Empire Exhibition but the site chosen was Wembley.

So, by 1930 only the Stadium remained for Greyhound Racing and short periods for speedway and QPR. It was demolished in 1984. The site is now a housing estate and the BBC Centre and Studios.

DENNIS BIRD

NEW BOY ON THE BLOCK

Just four months after moving to Chipping Barnet in February, I found myself parachuted into the role of Chairman of The Barnet Society's Planning and Environment Committee. My main qualification was willingness – there was not a queue of applicants for the job! – but maybe also considered of some relevance by the Society was the fact that for three years (2006-2009) I had fulfilled a similar role in the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association. However HGS and Barnet differ in many respects. Hampstead Garden Suburb contains some 5,000 households, of whom around half are members of the RA. Unlike Chipping Barnet, HGS is an entirely planned estate, built between 1907 and the 1930s. The whole Suburb is a conservation area and has dual planning controls, with planning consent needed from the HGS Trust as well as from Barnet Council. The Conservation & Amenities Committee that I chaired had around 10-12 members and there were separate committees for Roads & Traffic and for Trees & Open Spaces. In The Barnet Society, the Planning & Environment committee consists of Judith, our excellent new Chair, and me! So my first message is a call for volunteers: If any members out there would like to help in lobbying for improvements to (and against damage to) our physical environment and lifestyle in Chipping Barnet, please contact me at [planning @ barnetsociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@barnetsociety.org.uk).

First impressions of Barnet and the Barnet Society? Without doubt, the special characteristic of Chipping (or High? – HGS did not suffer from a split personality!) Barnet is the combination of Town and Country. The feel of a market town, just 'inches' from the Green Belt, yet buses to everywhere and no problem getting a seat on the tube for a ride to the Big City. The natives are friendly too. The Society's small committee comprises 100% doers, not just talkers as I have encountered in my previous life, and, in Judith, we have a dynamic and enthusiastic chairperson. The relationship with LB of Barnet

seems somewhat better than enjoyed (suffered?) in HGS and in Teresa Villiers we have a very supportive MP. My main concern is whether I will be able to begin to emulate the contribution made, and energy and enthusiasm displayed, by David Lee - which are legendary. I can but try. I also have a lot to learn about our patch, having lived here for less than six months, and pre-occupied with substantially re-building my house.

The Barnet Society (with the BRA) is more outward looking than the HGSRA. I attended the recent meeting of FORAB, the Federation of Residents Associations in Barnet, where there was much discussion about the major Cricklewood development including a doubling of the Brent Cross shopping centre. Although distant from Chipping Barnet, the impact on our and other similar struggling town centres could be significant. Also discussed were the problems of making our wishes known to a local authority as vast as Barnet. It was reported that ideas under investigation by various local groups include a possible referendum for the establishment of an elected Mayor; and the establishment of local Parish Councils, both permitted by recent legislation.

DEREK EPSTEIN Chairman, Planning & Environment Committee.

SOS FOR GREEN SPACES (all green spaces).

Green spaces, from gardens to fields and woodland, many of them habitats of increasingly rare species, are under threat as never before despite government action on 'brown-field' back gardens. Worrying papers from the London Green Belt Council have coincided with a major report and initiative in the Guardian. Caroline Spelman (Con) Secretary of State said 'Our environment needs help.' Hilary Benn (Lab) ex-Sec of State said 'We take nature for granted at our peril'. The two sides AGREE! A dedicated website (no address yet) is being set up to collect information and prepare cases. We would like to contribute. Will you join in? Contact David Lee on 8364 9161. More in November Newsletter.

EDITOR'S MUSING – 'WEBSITE OF THE MONTH'

A search on Google Books revealed amongst many other gems a facsimile edition of the Select Committee report on the state of Barnet Hill (1828) quoting from George Byng MP, James M^cAdam and Thomas Telford.

THE RE-BUILDING OF BARNET COLLEGE (PHASE ONE)

– a Layman’s Impression.

There can be few occasions when a group of residents have been allowed onto the site of a major building project in their town to see for themselves each significant stage of the work over a period of two years. Even less likely is having all of the visits conducted by the person with overall responsibility for the programme. However, thanks to David Lee’s central role in the successful struggle to reduce the planned height of the building, both of these were offered to Barnet Society members.

The first visit that David arranged was on 20th September 2008. In a way, this was the most dramatic of all the tours as the Site Manager, Keith McGinnis, showed us round what, at first sight, seemed nothing much more than an empty space. What work there was seemed to be going in the wrong direction. We looked into a very large hole which was to function as a basement and admired a machine that was slowly boring the 365 holes, on average 20m deep, for the supporting piles.

Keith pointed out some flexible pipes of about six inches in diameter that were protruding from the ground in the corner of the site near to the Conservative Club. Intriguingly, he told us that these were water pipes which went to a depth of about 100m, where the strata temperature was several degrees above that just below ground level, and the heated water was then pumped back to the surface. This rise in temperature more than compensates for the pumping bills and the installation costs will be recovered by the reduced heating fuel charges after about 8 years. A little more of this later.

The one structure that had gone in the right direction was the previous College building. Maybe the Mayor should have struck the first blow with a sledge hammer while the church bells pealed out and we locals sung and danced with joy but, suffice to say, it had gone. In its place was the most stunning view of St John the Baptist Parish Church and the back of the Tudor Hall. Some of the photographs showing this unique and transitory aspect of these two landmark Barnet buildings taken by Peter and Graham Willcocks were reproduced in the November 2008 Newsletter.

Three months later we returned to the site which was now more as we expected such a place to be in midwinter. For a start, it was raining and we crossed quite deep pools of water on wooden planks which kept our feet dry. The journey was more than worthwhile as on the far side of the site, looking up Wood Street, the building was now reaching for the skies. Remarkably smooth columns of concrete were already supporting some of the first floor

and fingers of reinforcing wire were pointing further upward ready to strengthen the columns for the next level.



David and Owen relaxing with cream teas in the Churchyard after a College visit.

The largest machine by far that stood on the site was, of course, the tower crane that became a familiar part of the Barnet skyline up to the time of the completion of the roof sections. A second crane that extended hydraulically until it was tall enough to lift the sections off the tower crane took just a few days to dismantle the first one and then both were gone. However, well before that happened, David arranged in July 2009 for Graham Willcocks and myself to climb the tower crane.

Some of our photographs are shown in the August 2009 Newsletter as well as an account of the splendid views across London to south of the Thames and of the vistas all around us. The ever-generous Keith then took two more members to the top of the crane, again in good weather, a few weeks later.

During the next visit we found ourselves walking up bare concrete internal stairways and marvelling at the complex network of mild steel reinforcing rods used to strengthen the concrete floors and pillars. We hung on tightly to simple ladders that took us through the skylights onto the roof of the main building. It was strangely difficult to identify some of the places that are so

familiar at ground level but reassuring to see the parks and gardens nearby and the precious Green Belt beyond.

Already in place were seemingly miles of differently coloured cables, many ready for the streams of computer data that would pour through them. Copper piping for the hot and cold water looked so attractive and it seemed a pity that most of these colourful service parts would soon be covered over and not left for the students to admire. Differently coloured rows of electrical switches, heating control valves and banks of junction boxes were each having their brief moments of glory before disappearing behind locked doors for the rest of their lives.

Our most recent visit was in July this year and the college appeared to be close to completion. Laboratories, looking very similar to those I knew all too well seventeen years ago, had their supplies in place. The various kilns, grinding machines and metalworking equipment from the old building were waiting to be connected up in the pristine craft and engineering workshops. The natural light levels in the spacious central atrium enhanced the pleasing appearance of this area which the students will pass through on their way to the classrooms, workshops and laboratories. I recalled previously admiring the skilfully constructed shuttering that resulted in the large circular skylights that were now letting this light into the building.

The boiler house was one place that I was particularly anxious to see as this stood where I had previously seen the ends of the pipes that were to carry the newly warmed water from 100 metres below ground level. The contrast between dimly remembered school boiler rooms with *Battleship Potemkin* scenes of sweating caretakers shovelling coke into dusty furnaces and what now presented itself was total. What looked like two shiny green kitchen cupboards, each labelled *Heat Pump*, were connected up to the network of underground pipes. Several much larger cupboards, more like wardrobes, had labels such as *Boiler One* and *Boiler Two*. More recognisable pumps were all ready to spring into action at the command of remote sensors when some sections of the College become a bit chilly. One or two of the cupboards were already humming quietly as they supplied the hot tap water needed by the site workers.

On each of the visits we noted the restoration work on the outside of the Tudor Hall. Keith told us that the building was basically sound in spite of the relatively shallow foundations. On this last visit we went into the Hall itself and witnessed the considerable amount of major restoration work that was going on. The new stairs to the gallery were being built and the brickwork around the fireplaces carefully repointed where necessary. On the side of one

of the fireplaces were carved the letters 'E R'. It was quite a thought that this referred to the last of the Tudors, Queen Elizabeth the First, who reigned from 1558 to 1603, rather than our own gracious Queen.



Perhaps the best moment of all for me was to stand in the front courtyard area and try to picture how it will appear when all the building materials and machinery had gone. I thought back to David's first comments about how the College building would look if the initial plans in early 2007 were to be implemented without reducing the height. However, just over three years later, the facing and general appearance of the now 3-storey building is both attractive and unobtrusive. Just what the citizens of Barnet will make of the combination of the magnificent grey stone Parish Church, the mellow brick of Tudor Hall, the shiny metal columns of the visitors' area to the south and the College itself remains to be seen. I felt a great sense of relief in that what I had earlier thought was going to detract from the generally pleasant vistas of much of our town looked now as though it would be a place to seek out and enjoy for many years to come.

OWEN JONES

BARNET COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Our Environment Fair, jointly organized with Barnet Environment Network, was in June. The Mayor and Mayoress of Barnet came along and our new local councillor David Longstaff. Around 300 local residents visited and enjoyed walking around the reserve and talking with the representatives of many local organizations and societies who kindly supported the event – Barnet Society included! Our MP Theresa Villiers arrived by bike – having set off with the Greenacre Bike Rally from North Finchley earlier the same day. We all enjoyed the homemade cakes too!

We hope that you have received our new leaflet that was distributed through 2000+ High Barnet letterboxes prior to our Fair. Perhaps you could consider joining (only £5 individual or £10 family)? Maybe you would like to get involved as a volunteer (many varied opportunities – nature reserve management, buildings maintenance, distribution of letters, IT support, helping at stalls and cake baking too!)?

The important breaking news is that after almost two years of process, Noah's Ark Childrens Hospice charity has completed negotiations to purchase the site from London Borough of Barnet. London Wildlife Trust and ourselves will have a sublease for the nature reserve and new building in order that the services we currently provide are protected and enhanced. We understand plans for the new buildings will be submitted to the planning department this autumn.

Our next public event is a Bat Walk & Talk in September (£3 per person – please ring Sue Bird on 020 8449 0705 to book your place – sorry, no children). We hope to have a fundraising stall at the Barnet Xmas Street Party and then a Quiz Night in February.

NOTE: Friends of Barnet Countryside Centre is a registered charity maintaining the Denis Bland Nature Reserve in Byng Road, facilitating school visits and organizing local community events. The site is not open for public access. Please see www.fobcc.org.uk for more details or email info@fobcc.org.uk, or ring the centre mobile 07816 890 128.

SUE BIRD, Chair, Friends of Barnet Countryside Centre

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT NOTES

It was, you will remember, the Cheshire Cat sitting on the branch of a tree, who faded away - first the tail, followed by body; ears; whiskers, until only its grin was left for Alice to ponder. And so I must tell you that now it is my time to start fading - how quickly, we shall see, but I hope that my grin will stay for a while.

As many of you know, I have left the Committee after 15 uninterrupted years, during which I have kept some sort of an eye on what has been going on in our space, as well as outside. Back in 1995 I was persuaded to join our Golden Jubilee project and ended up seeing 1000 trees planted on Whittings Hill. Two separate stands, fairly close to each other and containing only native species, are now well established with some trees approaching forty feet in height. As in any woodland, natural selection is taking place with some species crowding out others, lower level herbage brought in by wind or birds establishing itself and those wonderful, unique woodland spaces beginning to form. I hope that cash-strapped Barnet Council, whose responsibility it is, will be able to join with us in formulating a suitable long term management plan.

But, for me, one thing led to another and I was unable to prevent my itching concern with the apparent decline of the town centre from regularly surfacing in the Committee. Monitoring the weekly planning applications (they used to be known as 'the green sheets' - guess why) came my way and inevitably, it seemed, I became involved in the problems and possibilities of local town planning in tandem with a then very community-friendly and pro-active council. By 1998, the Barnet Society had been accepted as a member of Barnet Town Centre Forum, an advisory body of community representatives working closely with Council Officers under the wise and easy-going chairmanship of Councillor Andrew Dickie. Many good ideas were able to surface and develop in this atmosphere and we were able to contribute a few. One of them involved some more trees. Back in 1827 Thomas Telford regraded Barnet Hill (using materials from the then lumpy Pricklers Hill, I believe) and thus produced a more direct route up to Chipping Barnet. With its naked shoulders dropping back into the natural gradient on both sides, it must have been quite stark. Even photographs of the Horse Fair on Underhill in the 1920s show a very unclothed slope, although on the east side the arrival of the Great Northern Railway eventually brought tree planting around the shoulder as well as to the railway station. Back to the Forum, whose members and, later, the Leader of the Council were enthused by the idea of planting the very open western slope and so, 172 years after Telford,

we planted the long line of Norway Maples, together with assorted London Planes, Crabs and Whitebeam. In February 2006 they were joined by a Tulip Tree planted by Mayor Tambourides to celebrate our 60th birthday.

Just how wide the Barnet Society's involvement in planning issues now is can be seen from my recent Annual Report, so I will not repeat all that. One strand that is missing is the extent to which our towns and spaces are shaped by unseen political forces. Can you really read a political manifesto? Do you really think that you know how politicians will act unhindered, or under pressure? What will their words, or those of their senior officials, mean when translated into action? Right now, I know of a pleasant little terrace that is about to be ruined by the addition of a mansard roof extension, permitted under the General Development Order (2008 I think) and, therefore, not needing planning approval. Any sensitive person would say 'it really isn't appropriate - don't do it' but it can happen almost anywhere. Of course planning had little to do with the GDO. It was really all about money. Developers and the construction industry leaned on the politicians and, hey presto. With uncontrolled political forces conflicting with community and environmental interests, I fear for our town.

Many of the ethical signposts that I grew up with and respected in my professional life are now rotting and leaning dangerously. Planning is becoming more of a political and financial maelstrom. In some ways, therefore, I am glad to be standing down. But, how do I introduce my successor after that? Well, the new man is Derek Epstein and it's clear that he knows a thing or two, having chaired the Conservation and Amenities Group in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Courageously, he is taking on the Planning & Environment mantle for the Barnet Society and we all wish him well. All power to his elbow.

Back to the here and now. I was sorry not to have been present on the 9th July for the tour around the almost-finished Barnet College (sciatica laid me low). It seems to have gone very well. A week later and the contractor handed over the building to the client and straight away its status changed - from contractors' building site to college building, ready to be occupied by students and staff and filling with all the impedimenta which will make it live for its users. Over 40 society members have joined the visits during the last year or so and have seen, at close hand, the changes from cleared and open site to the complex and impressive present structure. I am delighted that Owen Jones has found time to put down some of his impressions - he is the only member to have come on all of the visits *and* climbed the great tower crane! The July visit also included a look at Tudor Hall, once an Elizabethan

assembly space and classroom, and destined now, no doubt, for some of the College's more prestigious 21st century events. What would the Founders in 1573 have made of it all?

A quick sweep-up now. The LDF (Local Development Framework) has been delayed - expect the public consultation in September, and find documents in the Library or on the web. After the elections, the process of un-picking previous planning policies and substituting new ones is well under way. Designating private gardens 'greenfield' instead of 'brownfield', and thus blocking many rear developments, is reckoned to be a considerable plus. Eric Pickles is now Secretary of State (replacing John Denham) and has very quickly decided not to call in the planning application for the Brent Cross redevelopment - that means no public enquiry into a project that will affect retail businesses and others over a wide radius, cause traffic problems across North London, gridlock locally, as well as acting as a destabilizing factor in other ways. This could be called a rather large minus (but watch Derek's space - there may yet be more reaction).

From the sublime to the ridiculous. While Barnet Council are using the three month summer break to rush through major amendments and a plethora of items on the £4.5 million Brent Cross proposals, the owners of our beleaguered Barnet Market have spent as long refusing to do the decent thing and resurface it, at a cost of a couple of thousand. No one asked the owners to expel the traders in December 2007. No one asked for the demolition of the old market premises or the dislocation of the traders' businesses or the loss of so many of them who could not cope with the move or the interference with the Stapylton Road car park or I could go on. The impressive 5000 signature resurfacing petition has now been sent to the owners, but (at the time of writing) there has been no acknowledgment.

The future shape of the Council (out-sourcing), the Town Centre Strategy Board with its lack of cohesion and openness, and the lurking clouds over the Green Belt are all matters which keep me awake at night. A great range of issues, large and small, confront us. Please find a way of helping our new Chairman Judith Clouston, Derek Epstein and the Committee in tackling them.

I am not sure where I will function in the future, but if you happen to see a grin in a tree

DAVID LEE

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SATURDAY 4th SEPTEMBER: 10.00 a.m.

Visit to Tudor Hall, which should be refurbished.

Numbers are limited. To book, telephone **David Lee : 8364 9161**

SUNDAY 12th SEPTEMBER 10 a.m.

Walk led by Owen Jones – very suitable for families

A walk of about four miles in the hilly countryside around Essendon, and Little Berkhamstead, then lunch at the Rose & Crown, Essendon.

Meet in School Lane, south of the War Memorial

If you need or can offer a lift, please contact **Owen Jones : 8440 7550**

**WEDNESDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 3.30 p.m. at Church House
‘CHIPPING BARNET TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY BOARD’**

An open meeting to discuss progress on plans for our town centre.

WEDNESDAY 20th OCTOBER 2.00 p.m.

Visit to Barnet College with the Architect - a working building, including external works, landscape (and students). Numbers are limited.

To book, telephone **David Lee : 8364 9161**

FRIDAY 29th OCTOBER 2.30 p.m. at Church House.

THERESA VILLIERS MP

Another chance to meet, hear and question our newly re-elected MP.

**WEDNESDAY 24th NOVEMBER 2.30 p.m. at Church House,
NICK JONES – “Is Coalition Government the End of Spin?”**

Nick Jones, retired BBC Political Correspondent, is one of Westminster’s seasoned observers. He covered many general elections and we are guaranteed an illuminating and entertaining talk

MONDAY 6th DECEMBER 2.30 p.m. at Church House.

TERENCE ATKINS presents CALENDAR 2011

Terence has produced calendars from old Barnet photos for many years now, raising funds for local charities. He will talk about his 2011 calendar and feature some of the evocative photos therein. Copies will be available.

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