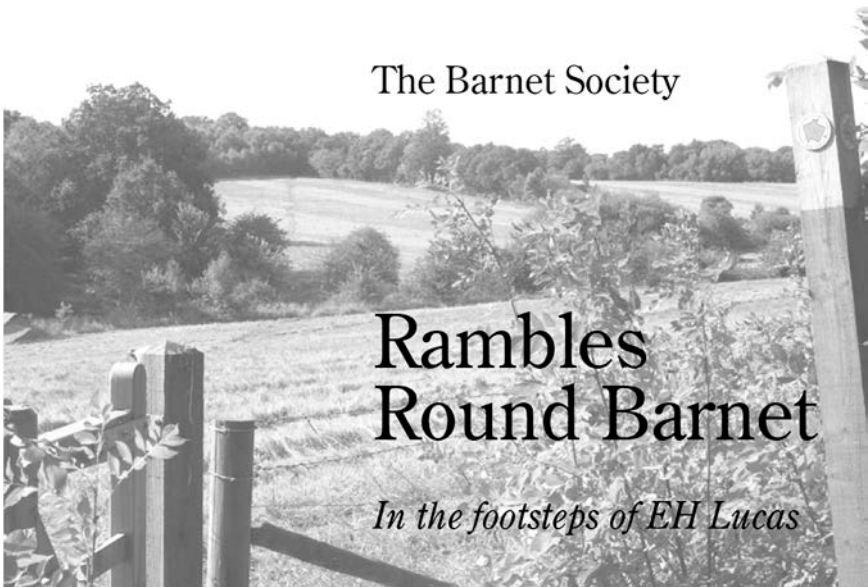


The Barnet Society

Campaigning for a better Barnet

NEWSLETTER

November 2012



The Barnet Society

Rambles Round Barnet

In the footsteps of EH Lucas

The cover of the Society's new book

CHAIR'S LETTER

The Green Belt is under threat again. We thought we'd managed to maintain its protection after the first draft of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was amended following responses last year from ourselves and many other campaigners, including the National Trust and The Daily Telegraph. However the Government seems determined to maintain uncertainty about the possibility of eroding controls on development within the Green Belts surrounding our major cities in order to 'promote growth' and solve the housing crisis.

No doubt this is, in part, the result of pressure from the major house-builders. Such bodies are less inclined to make planning applications on 'brownfield' sites and prefer open land without the complexities (and expense) of developing on previously-used land. The Chancellor announced possible relaxations on controls of development in the Green Belt in September in an attempt to provide new land to build on. However releasing small pockets of land incrementally is not going to solve any great financial crisis and is likely to blight many of our precious areas of green space. The new Planning Minister, Nick Boles, has added to the speculation by stating that there are some areas within the Green Belt which are considered as 'brownfield' and that Local Authorities should bring these forward for development first. References have been made for 'significant weight' to be placed on the need to support 'economic growth', together with suggestions that planning controls like Green Belts are an 'impediment' to such growth. Planning Inspectors have already started putting pressure on Local Authorities to permit building in the Green Belt to meet new targets for supplying land for housing.

As most of you will know, the Barnet Society was founded in 1947 because it was felt that the Green Belt that surrounded our town needed defending. And here we are again. Much of the delightful character of Chipping Barnet is due to the presence of the green, open land that surrounds us. Starting at the tube station, it runs up through King George's Fields, includes Hadley Wood, becomes Hadley Common, Hadley Green, a couple of golf courses, Byng Road Playing Fields, Barnet Countryside Centre and the fields up to Galley Lane, through Arkley, across more fields to Whitings Hill, across Mays Lane, along

the Dollis Brook and back to Barnet FC. This ‘green lung’ allows the place to breathe: it provides open space for recreation, for thousands of trees to thrive and for an important variety of wildlife habitat to flourish. Without the statutory protection, no doubt, urban sprawl would have devoured it many years ago.

The CPRE considers there is sufficient, truly ‘brownfield’ land available to supply over 1.5 million new homes and that most of it is in our towns and cities. This is where new homes are needed, with connections to existing transport, infrastructure and jobs. CPRE also claim that England’s major house builders, according to their own annual reviews, are sitting on huge areas of land with planning permissions which could provide over 280,000 new homes. The London Green Belt Council says there are approvals for around 400,000 new homes in total in England which are yet to be constructed. How does freeing up land in the Green Belt help this situation? The problem is more complex and includes the requirement to provide ‘affordable housing’ on all developments of 10 new dwellings or more in London, the increasingly onerous requirements to build low energy housing often with on-site renewables, the high cost of implementing planning consents triggering Section 106 payments (to cover ‘contributions’ to local schools, health centres, libraries, road improvements and the like), the new development ‘tax’ in London (the Community Infrastructure Levy, or CIL) being used to help pay for Crossrail and, of course, the fact that first-time buyers are increasingly unable to get mortgages without huge deposits. These are some of the obstacles to building new homes and go some way to explaining why there are so many un-built planning consents; supply of land is only one factor.

We are writing to both the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government and the Minister for Planning to ask for a strong and clear Government commitment to uphold existing Green Belt protection policy as included in the NPPF and to ask that Ministers cease from making statements that appear to undermine their own policy. We will, of course, be copying it in to our MP, Theresa Villiers. We urge you to do the same.

Time is rolling on and the One Barnet programme is getting closer to implementation. According to the Council’s website ‘.... *At the heart*

of the One Barnet programme is the aim to become a truly citizen-centric council.....' (whatever that means!). The services that are to be outsourced include Planning, Environmental Health and Transport which will be moved over to one of two preferred bidders in March next year. The decision as to whether this will be EC Harris or Capita Symonds will be made this month. We understand the Council will sign up to these companies for at least 10 years and the idea is that this will save us a huge amount of money. We also understand that many staff will continue to work in the same offices and that changes to the service will not be apparent (for the time being, at least).

It all sounds so reasonable in the light of the big cuts being imposed on Local Authority finances by central Government. Or does it? The problem so many of us have with this proposal is that our Council should be there to work for, and be answerable to, us. They are supposed to be our Local Authority. If we are unhappy with what they do, we can vote them out at the next election (viz. a certain Barnet Councillor and the GLA). But if the new provider under-performs, what redress will we have then? Our Councillors are likely to be powerless to control the unaccountable private company that runs these services and to prevent spiralling costs (or reductions in service), if things go wrong. Our local democracy is being undermined and there are still too many unanswered questions regarding the details of how the new system will work. For example, will delegated planning decisions still be made by existing officers who are familiar with the local area and who will (in theory) understand the implications of the decision, or by new officers that are not and will not?

Previous attempts at national and regional public-private partnerships and PFI initiatives have been fraught with problems and have, in many cases, not turned out to provide what was promised. In the last few weeks, the Chief Executive of Barnet Council, the chap responsible for overseeing this huge change, has resigned and taken a new (lower paid) job with Labour-led Haringey. This has led to much speculation as to the future of the One Barnet programme but, as we go to press, there is no news of any change to the proposal despite vocal campaigns by many residents and Council employees to stop it.

On a more positive note, we are pleased to tell you that the Chipping Barnet Town Centre Strategy Board has been reinstated at last, with our local Councillor, David Longstaff, helping it on its way and acting as Chair. After such a prolonged period of inactivity, the Council now wants to get the strategy adopted by the end of the financial year (March 2013). This means there is little time to change/add to the previous (2010) draft before going out to public consultation after Christmas. The document is far from perfect and should, in our opinion, have much greater urban design content. However, we are extremely pleased that the work that was carried out by all involved in its previous incarnation has not gone to waste and that there will, at least, be some form of strategy for future development in the town centre. We are also pleased to report a change in approach by the Highways Department in their attitude to measures for improving the key road junctions and streetscape (see Derek's report below) – no doubt the result of a change in the Cabinet Member responsible (yes, the same one that lost his seat on the GLA). We may get more public realm improvements and more trees in the High Street yet!

Lastly, we have taken a stall again in this year's Barnet Christmas Fayre in the High Street on Sunday 2 December and will be selling the new Barnet Society publication based on EH Lucas' 1947 booklet, *'Rambles Round Barnet'*. Do come along, have a chat (or a moan!) and buy your Christmas presents. Enjoy!

JUDITH CLOUSTON



Little details make a difference.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

We are pleased to welcome the following as members of the Barnet Society: Mr A M Kilb, Mr W R Wilson, Nr B Kingston and Mr and Mrs A Ward. We hope they will join in the various events arranged from time to time and contribute to the Society as fully as they feel able.

Subscriptions are still trickling in, though the list of non-payers is significantly shorter than in previous years; the effect of the standing order option perhaps. If however you have received a reminder notice with this Newsletter, please act upon it promptly if you wish to continue your membership through to next May.

Members will be sorry to learn of the death of our Mrs Amy Jones who is believed to have been our oldest member. Mrs Jones passed away at the end of September at the age of 102. An article on her life appeared in the February 2010 Newsletter at the time of her 100th birthday.

JOHN GARDINER



The Black Horse is getting a major facelift and extension.

PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT NOTES

Proposals that we wish to see implemented to improve our town seem to progress painfully slowly. Local stakeholder groups, including The Barnet Society, have recently been consulted by the Spires owners, UBS, about the proposed redevelopment of a central section of The Spires. As reported in our last newsletter, this is planned to comprise a new two-storey store and two extended shop units occupying the North site of the first square, replacing the existing units from Early Learning Centre to WH Smith. We are fully supportive of the idea of reinvigorating The Spires and positively welcome the prospect of bringing in bigger stores to attract more shoppers but we have a few concerns with the way the proposals are being put forward. We are not greatly enamoured of the architecture but are particularly concerned by the absence of proposals for servicing the new units that would be consistent with the subsequent construction of the retail link to the Market that UBS have professed to be part of their grand plan. Whilst the provision of one or more large ‘anchor’ stores is vital to the reinvigoration of the shopping centre, so too is the better integration of the market into the town centre’s retail circulation pattern. We are told that there will be a public consultation before or accompanying a formal planning application.

Progress on improvements to the existing market site has also been disappointingly slow. It was just before Christmas last year that UBS purchased the market site, raising our hopes for some early action to reverse the market’s sorry decline. Instead, UBS prepared a planning application during the summer for half of the site to be used on market days to accommodate market stalls and the other half to be used as a carpark; and for the whole site to be used for parking on non-market days. Barnet Council has, as we expected, refused to consider this proposal without a professional Transport Assessment in view of the potential traffic impact on Chipping Close and of cars turning into St Albans Road. The Transport Assessment has only recently been commissioned and planning consent is now unlikely be granted – if that is the Council’s decision – until the New Year. Meantime UBS seem to be making no effort to recruit additional stall-holders.

One piece of good news regarding this neck of the woods is that planning permission has been refused for the redevelopment of the bowls shop adjoining Barnet market to provide a four storey building of shops, first floor offices and two storeys of flats above. The Council has agreed with us that this would be a gross overdevelopment of the site.

There is more good news to be reported at the other end of town, where it looks as if the old Magistrates Court may be saved. Permission for redevelopment as a modern 3-4 storey block of flats was earlier refused by Barnet and subsequently rejected at appeal and the owners have now applied for consent to convert the existing building to provide nine flats behind and above two ground floor retail units. If this scheme is approved - which seems likely - the campaign by local groups including The Barnet Society and many of its individual members to save the Court House from demolition will have been vindicated.

Further downhill is the Dollis Valley estate. Redevelopment plans were revealed and explained to us at a meeting with the developers and their architects in August. The overall development will be in five phases, spread over a period of about five years. There will eventually be approximately 630 new homes of which some 390 will be for sale, including intermediate sale, and at least 230 rented. The first phase of development will be on the site of the disused school, allowing residents to be 'decanted' to free-up buildings for the subsequent phase. Planning applications (outline for the whole scheme and detailed for Phase 1) are expected shortly. Details of the proposed scheme may be found at www.dollisvalley.co.uk and summarised in the News section of our web site.

In my last report I expressed the hope that, after the change of control over Highways matters at Barnet Council, possibilities may open up for a more creative approach to streetscape improvements to the High Street to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. It now appears, from a recent meeting between Strategy Board representatives and Council Highways and Planning officers, that this might happen. Council officers talked of pavement widening, not only at the pelican crossings and loading bays, as I suggested last time, but maybe also widened and strengthened pavements to accommodate parking. A key

benefit of this would be the ability to plant trees and the overall effect could be to create a far softer and more pedestrian-friendly environment. Don't hold your breath, but at least they are willing to contemplate it; this, alone, is a breakthrough. The promised changes in parking charges have taken place but are less radical than we had hoped. Apart from the Stapylton Road carpark, where charges have effectively halved, the charges elsewhere have been reduced by 15% - too little and too late. And there is no sign yet of the promised credit card (not cash) machines in carparks.

New shops in the High Street include Home & Tidy opposite Barnet College, a slight improvement on the previous Abassi store (although we were led to believe that they intended to replace the tacky shopfront), and a new coffee shop, Harris & Hoole, currently being fitted out in the shop previously occupied by the Gold Shop. It looks very smart from their website and just the kind of thing we need to push up the image of the High Street, but we are concerned that this could be an attempt by Tesco, who are 49% owners of the business, to get into a more central position in our High Street



Foxtons seem to be taking their time in fitting out their units on the corner of Moxon Street.



In terms of national planning policy it seems to be one step forward, one step back. No sooner had civic societies fought off the worst aspects of the new National Planning Policy Framework than we were hit by the Government's latest brainchild – the doubling of permitted development rights for home extensions and proposed weakening of restrictions upon development within the Green Belt. Judith writes in her Chair's report about the threat to the Green Belt. Here in Barnet we continue to monitor applications within the Green Belt which often involve the intensification of sporting facilities. One such is at the end of Arkley Lane. The site is already used is for the sport of Horseball, described in the planning application as a "cross between basketball and rugby on horseback ... fast, furious and physical", and the proposals would involve a considerable intensification of that use. Sleepy old stables are proposed to be turned into pukka stables, ancillary buildings and an office with a much bigger footprint than is there now. Arkley Lane is a single track lane running past houses where significantly

increased traffic volumes would cause nuisance to residents along the lane and potential damage; plus nuisance from noise and floodlighting.

The doubling of the right to build extensions without planning permission (to 6m for semi-detached houses and 8m for detached houses) has produced howls of protest from many local authorities - with newspaper headlines of “Eyesore extensions and neighbourhood rows to soar after planning deregulation, planners warn” and some boroughs vowing to seek to defy the proposals. Fortunately for us, a large part of own town is covered by two conservation areas where these development rights do not apply but there are still a lot of places in High Barnet where they do.

DEREK EPSTEIN

GAIL LASER writes:

Along with the other members of our Town Team I have been working hard to think of ways to make our town centre more vibrant and our shopping experience more pleasurable and varied.

Well I can announce that The Spires Shopping Centre is about to host Pop Up shops throughout the Christmas season and maybe beyond.

Pop Up shops are vacant, difficult to fill shops that kindly landlords allow to be occupied on a short term rent free basis for a period of a couple of weeks through to a few months by new businesses that would like to go into retail or have high street presence but are afraid of the huge financial commitment. The provisos are that business rates are paid, that the shops be left as they are found and vacated immediately should a long term rent paying tenant wish to occupy the space.

So how did this happen here in High Barnet?

Whilst in a meeting with the managing agent of The Spires and others, I casually asked if we could roll out a pop-up programme never thinking that the reply would be a positive one. But much to my surprise and delight it was a yes so without further ado I contacted our local roving reporter Dan and asked if he would be so kind as to do an editorial feature for me; you may have read it in the Press a couple of weeks ago. Anyway the response has been amazing and whilst I have not been

involved in any of the selection or due processes, I am none the less excited to see what businesses will appear, as I hope now are you. Please support them if you can.

I would love to be able to replicate a Pop Up store programme on our high street but sadly it would seem that the landlords prefer the shops to either remain empty or to be taken by yet another charity. Perhaps you can help me on this. Would you like to get involved for surely we need all the help we can. You don't need to join the Town Team although that would be nice, but you could help us to drive a campaign. What we would love to have are small groups or even a group of one to help us on specific projects. For this one all you would need to do is telephone the letting agents and ask that the shops be used in the short term as Pop Ups. Don't worry I can fill you in on the details but the more of us that can support us in saving our town the better. In fact there is always something to do and you know what they say "many hands make light work". Please give me a call or send me an email if you feel you have a bit of spare time and would like to help us. My number is printed at the foot of this article.

I am sure that like me you will have noticed some activity behind white boards on our high street. This is because a new stylish artisan coffee shop is opening. Harris & Hoole, a young company partly funded by Tesco (you may have seen them on TV) plan to serve light lunches and fresh pastries. They would like you to feel that they are part of the community and I believe will encourage you to bring along your something from home, an old recipe book perhaps or some such to make the store feel homey and local. From what I have discovered from their web site, their restaurants look rather stylish and welcoming so let's hope they can replicate on our high street all that they have managed to do elsewhere. Take a look at their web site

www.harrisandhoole.co.uk

And what else.... I have recently been introduced to some young and engaging local artists by Trevor Rundle, a fabulous lecturer at Barnet College who actually taught my own daughter, a struggling dyslexic, and inspired her to go on to get a degree in fine art.

The young artists share in our enthusiasm for our town centre and have great future plans and ideas. Like many of us they have a vision and believe that to achieve this we need to give the Town focus, right here at the end of the Northern Line, much as Hoxton has done for East London. Indeed an art centred area has been one of three key areas included in a shopping wish list by us locals in the Town Centre Strategy that is currently being written up by Barnet Council. We need status, and uplift and hopefully these young people will help us to achieve that. Their artistic talents are varied but the common denominator is that they each attended Barnet College, went off to do degrees at various Universities including Central St Martins and have now joined forces to create an exciting arts venue right here in the heart of Barnet. They have leased/rented a wonderful space in the old Victorian workhouse in Alston Road behind The Spires and hope to make it a destination for inspiring artists and visitors alike. If you would like to find out more why not send an email to Tom at dansgallery@live.com.

And finally Seasons Greetings to you all and let us hope that 2013 will be a happy and healthy one for all of us and our town centre too.

GAIL LASER

Mob: 07956 464 306

LUCAS REVISITED – A PROGRESS REPORT

Members will recall the feature in the August 2012 Newsletter about the guidebook of local walks that the Society has commissioned to honour the Diamond Jubilee of our Queen. I am pleased to say that David Ely and I have made steady progress on the project since that time. In fact the final draft is now with Peter Willcocks who is processing the narratives, photographs and maps in readiness for the printers. David and I have enjoyed trying to follow the routes that Mr Lucas took in 1947. The article in the last Newsletter described some of the hazards that we were encountering, particularly those presented by the traffic on today's roads. It is looking at the moment as though neither of the authors will have the suffix of 'posthumous' in the title page and we are

hoping that following the routes will not hasten that day for any of our readers.

FOREWORD

Since 1939 there has been little attempt to maintain footpaths, and the drive for agricultural production has meant that many have been ploughed up and lost. In the summer of 1947 the Barnet Society asked me to carry out a survey of the footpaths in the area, and as a result of the report I then made, it was decided to prepare a small book giving a selection of the more attractive routes. These are of course capable of almost endless variation, according to the inclination (or energy!) of the walker. All walkers should use the 1" Ordnance Survey Map, Sheet No. 160 in the new edition, which can be obtained at most good stationers. It is, I am sure, unnecessary for me to remind you of the need for avoiding damage to crops, and making certain that all gates are closed behind you. Unfortunately, there is a tendency nowadays for farmers to use barbed wire indiscriminately, and if any of the routes mentioned in this booklet are thus made impassable, the Society would be glad to have details.

E.H.Lucas.

Mr Lucas's original Foreword

We have set out walks ranging in length from two to six miles and given details of how the starting points may be reached by bus or car. Mr. Lucas travelled by bus to the start of some of the walks and then relied on them to return him to Barnet when necessary. This took him out to parts of South Hertfordshire that are rarely, if ever, covered in the larger, county-wide guide books. Some of these walks have provided delightful surprises for the authors and we have tried to work out how they can be accessed by bus and/or car travel.

Within each of the walks, there are variations, or shortened sections, to suit the less fit walker or the busy person who needs to drive to the starting point, walk for a few miles but end up back where the car is parked. Each walk is covered by a sketch map which shows the relevant bus stops and suitable parking places for a car. Significant landmarks

along the routes are numbered in the accounts and these numbers are shown on the maps to help with navigation.

There are over a dozen colour photographs in the book, some showing the start of a walk and others of vistas along the way. Thanks to the generosity of Terence Atkins, there are 5 reproductions of scenes from years past. Each walk account includes sections on the local history of the area and there is information to interest those who enjoy natural history as well.

I am so grateful to members of the Society and local friends who have checked out the walks accounts by using the earlier drafts to actually follow the routes as set out. They then provided invaluable guidance on how they could be clarified or corrected. In particular, I am indebted to Barry Blain, a recent Chairman of the Society, and Sue who have walked round some of the less straightforward parts of Walk 3. This has resulted in these accounts being clearer and more accurate. A near neighbour of mine, Malcolm Messiter, the oboe player, designed and made a device that made it so much easier for me to draw the roads on the maps as parallel lines. Chris and Diane Nightingale read through the General Introduction which has resulted in an improved version of this part of the book. Some especially literate friends have proof read sections of the book which now read more easily (and more grammatically).

The plan is to have this book ready for sale at the High Street Christmas Fayre on Sunday 2nd December. It will also be available for sale at the Barnet Museum and, we hope, at the Barnet Library and the Paper Shop (formerly Smoker's Paradise) at the Hadley end of the High Street, but we need to confirm the latter two in due course. We hope that it will not be a reluctant or dutiful purchase but will make interesting reading for members of the Society. Maybe you will deem it worthy as a Christmas present for family and friends and, perhaps, it will be an agent in the struggle to help us lose those extra pounds that we all too readily seem to acquire each Christmas.

OWEN JONES.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SUNDAY 2nd DECEMBER 2012 12 noon to 4.30pm

Barnet Christmas Fayre in Barnet High Street.

The Barnet Society will be having a stall and selling the new Rambles Round Barnet booklet.

WEDNESDAY, 19th DECEMBER 2012 at 10.00 a.m.

A pre-Christmas walk in Trent Park

Leave the Christmas preparations behind and enjoy a winter walk of 3 to 3½ miles in Trent Park.

We will meet in the car park of the Cock and Dragon Pub in Chalk Lane, Cockfosters.

For those who would like to stay after the walk, the pub does good lunches - both Thai and more traditional food.

If you would like a lift or can offer one, please contact Diane Nightingale on (020) 8440 0203.

FRIDAY 1st MARCH 2013 at 3p.m.

A Question & Answer Session

with Chipping Barnet MP and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP. Venue to be confirmed.

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