

THE Barnet Society

SPRING 2022 | £1



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.

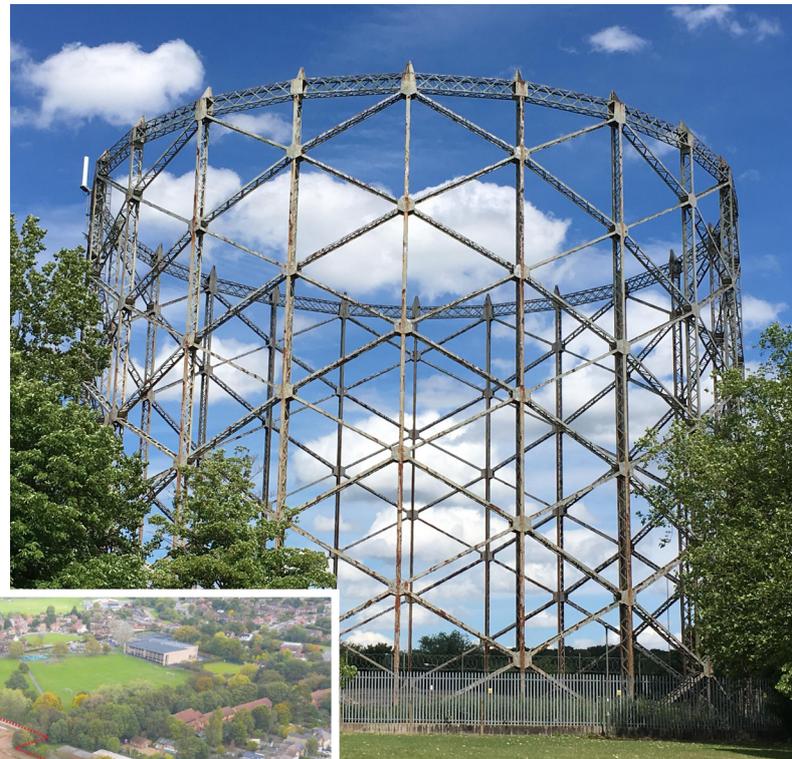
More than 800 residents in

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 **Continued, Page 2** ➔

Continued from Page 1

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 Goldfingeresque 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.



No 110th birthday for the 84

Robin Bishop writes

How sad that the 84 bus between Barnet and St Albans should stop running just before its 110th birthday. Since 3 August 1912 it has connected Barnet and Hertfordshire, but come April the Barnet end of the route seems likely to be axed.

Operator Metroline announced last month that the route would close, sparking protests and a petition of nearly 7,000 signatures.

Even though Sullivan Buses took on the section between St Albans and Potters Bar, the rest of the route looks set to shut.

Metroline's Commercial Development Director, Andrew Hunter, said that the route had just been breaking even prior to Covid-19 and was losing passengers.

"During 2019 I worked...to create a new reliable timetable, and invested in new ticket machines. We hoped that this would...stabilise passenger numbers so we could start investing in newer buses... [and] in time increase our customer base. [But] the weekend that this was due to be introduced coincided with the first weekend of lockdown

▲ The old 84 bus en-route to St Albans in the 1920s, while its modern counterpart sits at the current terminus of the route at New Barnet Station

“ Unfortunately, Covid-19 had a detrimental effect on the amount of people using the service

in March 2020. Unfortunately, Covid-19 had a detrimental effect on the amount of people using the service. Additionally, all other costs associated with operating bus services increased during the last two years.

"Therefore with funding unavailable at the level required, this route is no longer financially sustainable."

As I write, no saviour has been found for the section between Barnet and Potters Bar. TfL has been approached, but has grave financial challenges of its own.

It looks now like the end of an odd but much-valued strand of the London Transport network. For my Dad, as a teenager in St Albans in the 1930s, the 84 bus was his Saturday ride to watch Herbert Chapman's great Arsenal football team play at Highbury.

For my wife and I, as car-less parents in the 1990s, it was the way we introduced our son to the wonderful De Havilland aircraft collection at Salisbury Hall and to the Roman remains at Verulamium.

For ramblers round Barnet, it has been a short cut to the start of some beautiful countryside walks, and

the saviour of weary legs on their journey home.

More urgently today, for some residents in Potters Bar, the 84 is a vital link to Barnet General Hospital – and for some Barnet residents, to get to Potters Bar Community Hospital.

New homes should be built only if they are less car-dependent than today's estates. Buses (and other low or zero-carbon forms of transit) must play a bigger role.

One of the basic weaknesses of Hertsmeare's recent draft Local Plan was to propose building some 5,000 homes on its Green Belt, with hardly a word on how the new residents would be able to travel. To scrap the 84 – one of the few public transport routes across the borough – would be planning madness. Thankfully, the Plan has been resoundingly rejected (see Page 6).

The Barnet Society is watching developments closely. If the 84 Barnet-Potters Bar link is lost, we'll do what we can to secure an alternative. After all, some of the other buses that serve Barnet are garaged at Potters Bar, so surely it wouldn't be that expensive to extend their routes?

Chance for Barnet Hill to be put on the map

Barnet Hill and High Barnet Station are central to Chipping Barnet's identity. Their future should be subject to the widest public discussion, perhaps even an issue in the May local elections, writes Robin Bishop.

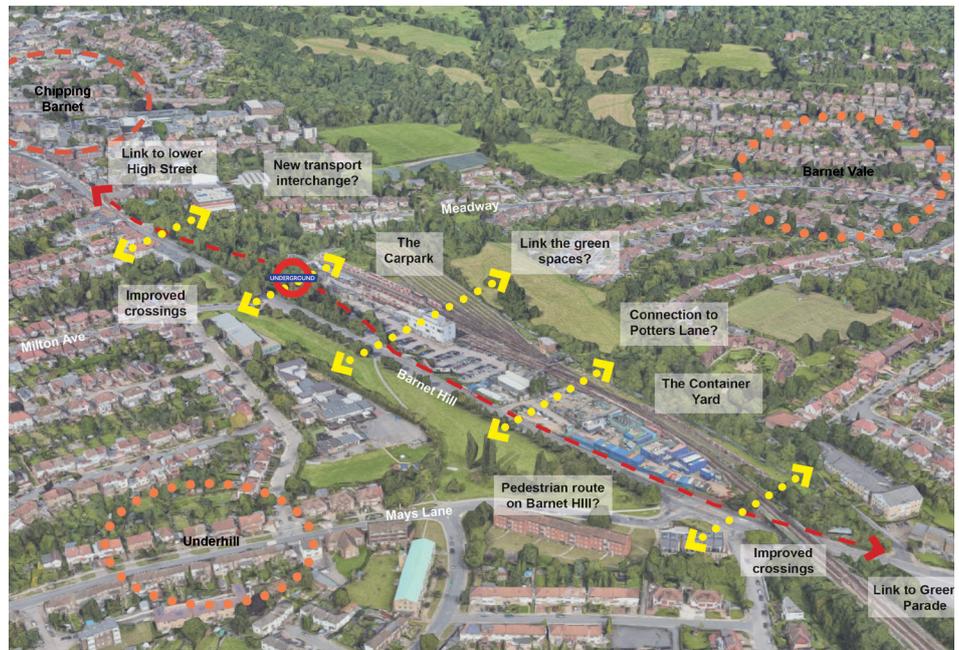
Last month, Enfield Council approved the building of 351 flats in towers up to 14 storeys high on Cockfosters Station car park, in line with the Mayor of London's new London Plan. Similar schemes have been given the go-ahead for other station sites across London. Transport for London (TfL) is in desperate financial trouble. TfL may turn their sights back onto High Barnet Station's car park.

Nearly three years ago, TfL consulted on a scheme to build about 450 flats along almost the length of Barnet Hill.

Following furious local opposition, TfL reduced the number of flats to 294 in six slabs of 6 & 7 storeys. But the design met few of the 20 criteria for a good development proposed by the Society. They can be read here: www.barnetsociety.org.uk/hb-response

During lockdown the project went quiet. Then the contractor, Taylor Wimpey, pulled out of its arrangement with TfL. Meanwhile, London's housing needs have not gone away. Barnet's draft Local Plan zones the station car park for housing. A planning application is likely sooner or later.

We believe that a better design is possible: a more appropriate mix of uses and better integration with the neighbourhood, both visually and physically. Committee Member and architect Simon Kaufman outlines key issues which must be considered, and local heritage expert and resident



▲ Yellow is possible new or improved pedestrian links east-west, Red improved pedestrian route north-south, and Orange circles are adjacent neighbourhoods

Guy Braithwaite points to the key starting point. These could form the basis of a community brief or masterplan that could attract wide support.

Simon Kaufman writes

While some organised communities have successfully lobbied to stop or reduce the scale of development around stations such as Stanmore, Canons Park, Finchley Central – and indeed High Barnet – the Mayor is on a mission to maximise the re-use of railway land.

He argues that reducing or removing suburban car-parks will reduce CO² emissions, congestion and improve air quality and that high-density development will provide as much new housing as possible, with his target for at least 40 per cent to be affordable.

But whilst a laudable social policy, 40 per cent affordable homes is a headache for any developer, and is one of several reasons we are seeing such large developments at station sites. It's worth considering what drives this scale.

A developer pays the not inconsiderable cost of the planning application, for all of the construction work, and has to bear the risks of things going wrong – all before any flats are sold. Although generally the sale of flats on the open market will

compensate for this later, affordable housing is usually built and sold without making a profit.

Additionally, on railway land there are other "abnormal" financial burdens for a developer. Typically there is a high cost to engineering work such as ground work and foundations; the land is frequently contaminated with industrial pollutants, or has infrastructure like the electricity transformers at High Barnet. The cost of dealing with these issues further drives the number of houses needed to de-risk projects and make them financially viable. Improvements that the community wants and needs – such as upgrades to the transport interchange, public realm and road crossings, community facilities or new landscaping also add to project costs but often are last to be added to the developer's priority list.

To counter these costs, developers are forced to optimise the amount of open market housing, and to maximise the size of the buildings to make a profit.

In short, development these days is not a piece of cake: station sites are a difficult category, and of all the ones in TfL's portfolio, this one is especially challenging.

The Society's constitution requires us to protect the environment – so what should it aspire to for a site

“ We believe that a better design is possible: a more appropriate mix...and better integration with the neighbourhood

Police station pledge

like this? It's a good moment for a thought experiment. An acceptable development might:

- Be smaller in scale.
- Prioritise business/employment use (sites for which are getting scarce).
- Propose another non-residential use.
- Retain some or all of the car park.
- Enhance the approach to the historic town centre with better footpaths and a cycleway, and more greening or screening.
- Provide a new transport interchange for local buses, taxis, private cars and bikes.
- Be better connected to the lower High Street, Greenhill Parade and Barnet Vale.
- Encourage more use of Meadway Open Space.
- Have a higher proportion of family homes.
- Have a different ratio of affordable homes – with the caveat that profit gained is used for improving community facilities, open spaces or an improved transport interchange.

It's likely there will have to be compromises on all sides for something of quality to happen. But Save New Barnet's recent success in seeing off the latest planning application for the Victoria Quarter was due to their knowledge of the site – helped by having a vision of what a good proposal could look like.

Guy Braithwaite comments

There are opportunities and long-term improvements that we need in Chipping Barnet, and particularly on Barnet Hill. Housing could be a major part of it, but there are other possible uses and players that could be involved.

For the station area we need, first and foremost, a transport hub: access within the station is acceptable; outside it is terrible – possibly the most unwelcoming arrival point on the tube network. Any development should be conditional on all modes of transport working together better. This should be a guaranteed community gain from development of the site.

New premises are to be found for the neighbourhood police teams serving the wards in and around High Barnet before the Metropolitan Police goes ahead with the sale of the High Street police station, writes Nick Jones.

Sophie Linden, Deputy London Mayor for Policing, has given an assurance that the station will not be shut down and sold until a new base has been found for the local ward officers.

MP Theresa Villiers, who feared that the neighbourhood teams would be moved to police headquarters at Colindale, has welcomed what she says is a partial reprieve.

“This is a partial victory because it acknowledges that a visible police presence in the Chipping Barnet constituency requires physical premises here for officers.”

A new base must now be found for the officers who serve High Barnet, Underhill, Totteridge, and Oakleigh Park wards.

These new premises must be in a location that allows the officers to reach their ward areas within 20 minutes by either walking or cycling.

In a letter to Ms Villiers, Ms Linden said: “I can assure you that the disposal of Barnet police station will not be completed before an alternative location for the ward officers which meets the

20-minute-journey time criteria has been found and implemented.”

A small police office at Cat Hill is to be retained for the ward officers for the East Barnet, Brunswick Park and Coppetts.

The High Barnet ward team says it has been working hard to restore the pre-pandemic level of contact with residents across the High Barnet ward which includes the area to the north and east of Wood Street and Station Road, New Barnet.

A separate Underhill Ward Safer Neighbourhood Team is responsible for the area south of Wood Street, which includes Barnet Hospital and Barnet and Southgate College.

Barnet's previous police station was demolished in the 1970s and the replacement building retained its prominent position in the High Street with extensive office space at the rear, over four stories, together with parking for police vehicles.

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, announced the closure last summer after the counter service for the public was withdrawn and transferred to Colindale. Plans to close the police stations at Barnet and Whetstone were first announced in 2013 when Boris Johnson was Mayor of London as part of measures to save the Metropolitan Police £500 million by 2015.



▲ Sophie Linden, Deputy London Mayor for Policing

◀ Barnet police station was built in the 1970s after the demolition of the previous building on the site (below)



Hertsmere Local Plan scrapped after 20,000 objections

Robin Bishop writes

Last autumn after Hertsmere Council, our northern neighbour, published a draft Local Plan that proposed to build over 10 per cent of its Green Belt, 20,000 objections were received, and in January it was scrapped. It's the latest in a wave of protests by residents that has resulted in some dramatic changes in councils around London.

The government says that it's committed to protecting and enhancing the Green Belt, and that's also a key principle of the National Planning Policy Framework. But there's a big gap between their words and what's happening on the ground:

- In November last year the Campaign to Protect Rural England's *Recycling Our Land* report showed that between 2006 & 2017 use of greenfield land for housing increased by 148 per cent.
- The London Green Belt Council recently estimated that there were plans to build 233,276 new houses on Green Belt land.
- The Planning Inspectorate has upheld appeals by developers to build on Green Belt in Colney Heath and Codicote, not far from Barnet.

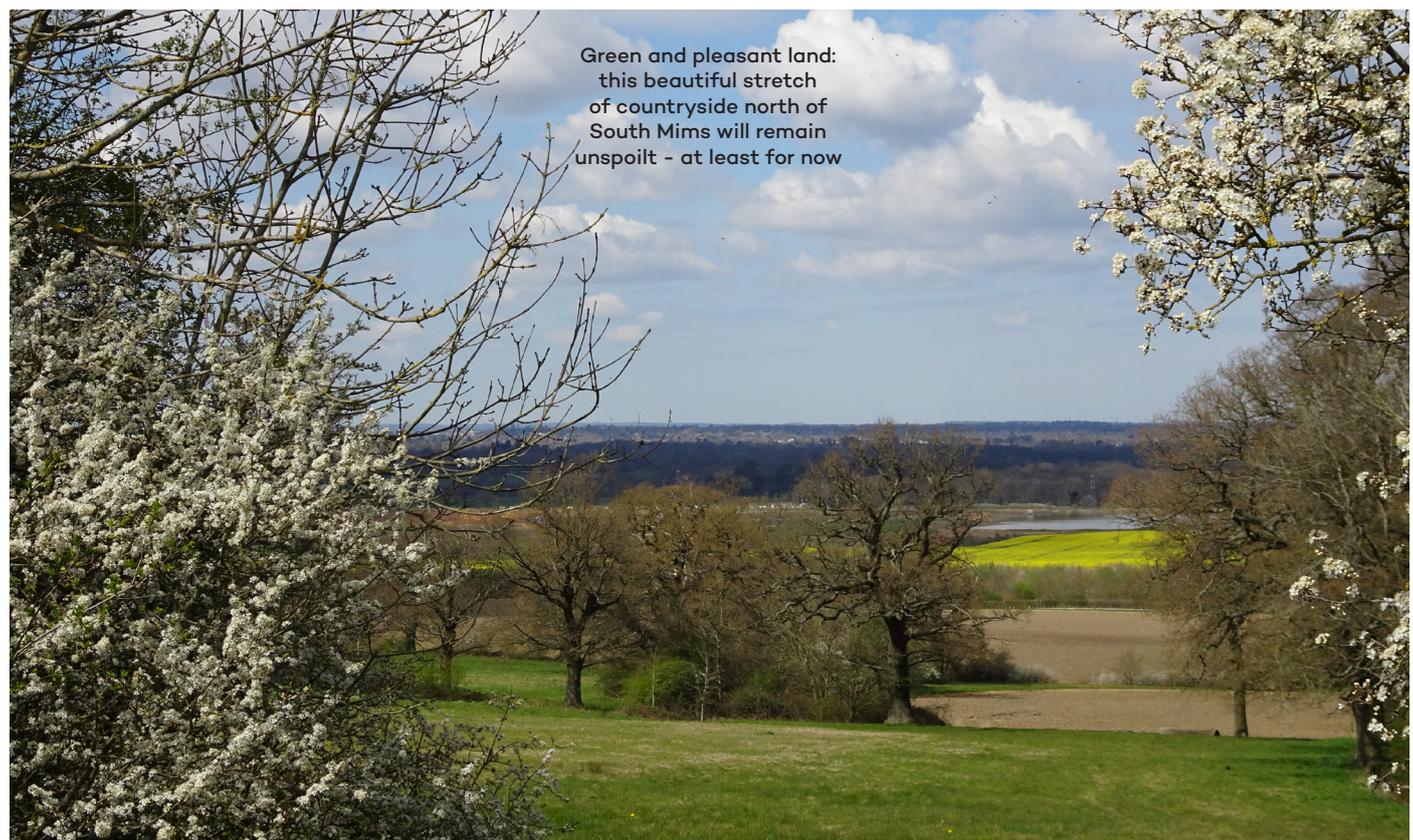
Last year in South Oxfordshire, six Councillors were suspended from the ruling group because they wouldn't vote for proposals for 6,000 more homes than in the previously approved Plan. In May's Council elections there were gains by Residents Associations, Independents and Green Belt groups in Surrey and other parts of

the Home Counties. In June, Liberal Democrats won the Chesham & Amersham parliamentary constituency from Conservatives with swing of 25%. All were driven at least partly by concerns about excessive housing targets imposed by government, and consequent loss of Green Belt.

Nearer home, Welwyn Hatfield Council has rejected an increase in the number of new houses recommended by a Planning Inspector, so it will not after all build on Green Belt land at Brookmans Park, Cuffley, Little Heath and at Symondshyde.

At Hertsmere, we worked with the Elstree & Borehamwood Green Belt Society – including its Committee Member, Jonathan Supran, who used to be Hon Secretary of the Barnet Society – to ensure co-ordinated objections. We also submitted one of 7,000 responses to Enfield Council's Plan, many of which objected to its building on Green Belt land at Hadley Wood, Crews Hill, Vicarage Farm and elsewhere.

We reject the charge that these objections are pure Nimby-ism. New homes in the Green Belt are usually carbon-inefficient, car-dependent and rarely affordable. Nor are they often of high architectural or landscape quality. One thing Covid has taught us is that the Green Belt is not simply to prevent urban sprawl: it's an irreplaceable reservoir of natural biodiversity that is vital to our health and that of the environment.



Green and pleasant land: this beautiful stretch of countryside north of South Mims will remain unspoilt - at least for now

Robin Bishop reports

Planning reforms

The government received a hefty 40,000 responses to its consultation on planning reform last year (including one from the Barnet Society), mostly critical. Revised proposals are expected in May, and we strongly hope that its housing targets for London and the South-East will be lower.

In the last issue I expressed concerns about Hertsmere's draft Local Plan, which proposed to build over 10 per cent of its (and our) Green Belt. We and 20,000 others objected, and the Plan has been scrapped (see separate article on opposite page).

By contrast, Barnet's draft Local Plan attracted a mere 800 responses, many constructive. We expect to take part in the public examination of the Plan this spring.

Town Team's Gail presses on

All has gone strangely quiet regarding the future of the former Barnet Market site, The Spires and the Chipping Barnet Community Plan.

Undaunted, Gail Laser and the Town Team are progressing with a pop-up workspace/retail unit in the High Street, applying for charitable status to obviate business rates and completing legal agreements. It will be an exciting chance for small businesses to try out space in the High Street at very little cost to themselves. Barnet & Southgate College students will engage with them as a 'live' creative project to include branding and identity. It is hoped to open in late spring/early summer.



▲ The proposed Windmill School, 50 Moxon Street

▼ Land at Hendon Wood Lane: Enforcement Order ignored



Some recent cases:

Following the three successes at appeal reported in our last issue, three more have gone our way:

Arkley Riding School, Hedgerow Lane – a Planning Inspector turned down four new houses in the Green Belt.

Land to rear of 14 Hadley Highstone – The owner has been ordered to remove derelict artefacts on a Green Belt site.

Sunset View [See LATEST on Page 1]

APPROVED

26-32 High Street (outside Police Station) – We objected to yet another InLink telecom hub.

5 Plantaganet Road – We supported this modest and sympathetic conversion and addition.

Former Quinta Club, Mays Lane – We supported conversion of this derelict building into a Council facility for the storage, archiving and dispatching of library books.

Hendon Hub – We objected to plans for insensitive and unsightly expansion of Middlesex University and repurposing of the listed Central Library.

Cockfosters Station (Enfield) – We strongly objected to 652 flats in four towers overlooking Hadley Wood and Trent Park. (See Page 4)

REFUSED

159 High Street – We objected to new dormers on this property in the Monken Hadley CA.

Victoria Quarter – We objected to this unimaginative overdevelopment (See cover story).

1-15 Richard Court, Alston Road – We objected to an extra floor on these flats.

WITHDRAWN

2 Clyde Villas, Hadley Green Road – We objected to this proposal for 16 flats for people with special needs, which would have crammed too many into the building and garden.

PLANNING DECISIONS AWAITED

The Windmill School, 50 Moxon Street – A special school for 90 pupils from 5 to 19 with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in a former office block. (See illustration in column 1) We have severe concerns about its suitability and quality, particularly its completely inadequate rooftop outdoor playspace. We consulted our members on email: 83 per cent of respondents agreed that we should object, and only 6 per cent supported the application.

81 advertising banners on lamp-posts, High Street & Barnet Hill – We objected.

70 High Street (fka After Office Hours) – Application to retain the lower two stories of this unlawful building, which an Inspector ordered to be demolished, but now with a new and lower roof.

196 High Street (fka Spizzico) – We objected to subdividing this retail unit because of harm to a building on the Local List and shopfront design not following Council design guidelines.

40 Barnet Lane (former cricket pavilion) – We supported this derelict building being used by the Rainbow Centre.

Gaelic football pavilion, King George's playing field – A replacement for a previous building, not to be confused with the sports/leisure hub proposed for Barnet Playing Fields.

Western half of Meadow Works site, Pricklers Hill – We supported these eight new family homes & gardens.

North London Business Park, Brunswick Park – Comer Homes propose to increase the number of homes from 1,150 to 2,428.

Electricity battery, Partingdale Lane (GB) – We objected to this abuse of the Green Belt.

GONE TO APPEAL

33 Lyonsdown Road (on the Local List); **33 Park Road** (additional storeys on existing flats); **Barnet House** (See Page 2); **202 & 204 High Street** (3-storey replacements for single-storey buildings in the Monken Hadley Conservation Area).

APPLICATIONS IN THE OFFING

A housing development at the bottom of **Moxon Street**.

RENEWED THREAT TO THE GREEN BELT

Land next to 56 Hendon Wood Lane, Arkley – For years the owner used this as a builder's yard. Council planners obtained an Enforcement Order, but it's being disregarded. If allowed to continue, the owner will be entitled to have the land redesignated as brownfield, i.e for building on.

Housing shortage

Of all the curiosities in High Barnet, perhaps the one which evokes the greatest pleasure is a collection of intricate tiny houses which decorate a tree stump in St Albans Road.

Passing motorists would probably miss them, but pedestrians on the pavement between the Army Reserve Centre and Christ Church are in for a surprise when they catch sight of the tree houses.

They are the treasured possession of Sue Brown, who has lived in St Albans Road for 25 years, and whose brother Steve Tremain designed and installed the tiny miniature homes in 2019.

“Within a week of him completing all these intricate little models and fixing them to the tree stump we had a coachload of Japanese tourists stopping to see them,” said Sue.

Photographs of Sue’s collection of tree houses appear frequently on websites which track and promote London’s oddities and hidden gems.

Her project in the coming weeks, once the weather improves, is to carry out an inspection and refurbishment of her brother’s minute handiwork.

“Some of the roof tiles and steps need repairing. One of the little staircases has broken away. Once I get going, I am sure there will be lots of other restoration work I can do.”

“My brother Steve was so imaginative, and his handiwork provides so much joy to children and folk walking along St Albans

Road. “Hardly a day goes by without someone stopping to take a photograph.”

Creating the little houses was an afterthought and came about almost by accident when branches started falling off the large tree in the front garden, just beside the footpath.

When the tree had to be reduced in size, it was found to be hollow in the middle and Sue’s brother, who was a master builder, suggested it should be capped with lead.

“We were left with a big stump which Steve began to decorate with these tiny houses. Once he started, he kept going and over the years they have brought so much joy to everyone.”



Sue Brown looks up at one of her brother’s tiny model houses

Tu Bishvat marked



Theresa Villiers gets stuck in with the other volunteers

Volunteer working parties have been busy supporting the Barnet Society’s latest tree planting initiative – to create a hawthorn hedge up to 100 metres long that should blossom each May and enhance still further the appeal of Barnet Hill.

Fifty Norwegian maples, which were planted beside the A1000 in 1999 to celebrate the millennium, have already created a widely admired tree-lined approach to High Barnet.

Chipping Barnet MP Theresa Villiers joined the first of three groups of volunteers planting hawthorn saplings to form a hedge along the western boundary of Barnet Hill to help screen the buildings within the Vale Drive Primary Care Centre.

Robin Bishop, who leads for the society on environmental issues, welcomed the first ten-strong working party to plant 60 saplings –

another step towards completing the three-year project to create a hawthorn hedge from St Catherine’s Primary School to the Vale Drive clinic.

The first of this winter’s saplings was planted by Barnet Society committee member Simon Cohen and as the planting commemorated Tu Bishvat, the Jewish New Year for Trees, he gave a Jewish blessing for a newly planted tree.

Three weeks later, a dozen volunteers from the Sha’arei Tzedek North London Reform Synagogue in Oakleigh Road North gave their support and planted another 60 saplings.

It was their first communal outing since the start of the pandemic and was a much-appreciated social event after months of social distancing.

Barnet Society committee member Simon Kaufman and his wife Olga were assisted by their daughter Ana (3) who tried her hand at tree planting.

“We’ve all been looking forward to this family outing -- and a delayed but much anticipated celebration of Tu Bishvat, the Jewish New Year for trees.”

Mr Bishop has been co-ordinating a three-year project by the Barnet Society to plant a total of 350 saplings on Barnet Hill’s western edge.

He told the volunteers that completion of the hedge was part of the master plan devised by Barnet Society stalwart David Lee who first persuaded Barnet Council to plant the line of maples.

“David is nearly 92, and unable to be with us but sends his best wishes.”

Ms Villiers expressed her delight at being invited to join the tree planting and to help pay tribute to David Lee for his inspiration.

Ben Wilson hard at work



CHEWING GUM ART

Anyone walking along the footpath at the junction of Alston Road and Carnarvon Road should make the effort to search out a fascinating trail of 21 illustrations by a celebrated pavement artist who was brought up in Barnet and whose miniature paintings on blobs of chewing gum have gained international recognition.

Ben Wilson, who has been featured recently in several national newspapers, painted a series of miniatures when visiting his mother.

From the corner of Alston Road and into Carnarvon Road, the 21 tiny paintings are tucked away just where the pavement abuts garden walls.

Some of the illustrations are rather the worse for wear, a little ragged around the edges, but their vivid design and colouring lives on.

Several are dated from around 2016 including one illustrating a griffin, which matches the griffin on brick pillars at the entrance to a house at the junction of the road.

A personalised chewing-gum miniature is a source of constant delight for Carnarvon Road resident Meri Bartley who is a great admirer of the artist's work.

In previous years Ben, who now lives near Muswell Hill, was sometimes seen painting his chewing gum illustrations along Barnet High Street, down towards the Tube station.

Much of this trail is long gone, having disappeared during pavement improvements, or has been worn away, but six rather battered images can still be seen between Tesco Express and the junction with Park Road.

In a feature in *The Observer*, by writer Tim Adams and photographer Antonio Olmos, Ben described how he started painting miniature illustrations on flattened blobs of gum that had been spat out on pavements.

Each painting is unique, and most are dedicated to passers-by or nearby residents. He has always refused to take any money for his gum pictures.

Over the years he has completed a series of trails of hundreds of chewing gum paintings across London, including the Millennium Bridge.

He has won international recognition for his work and has been commissioned to complete trails in various cities, including Zurich, Brussels and Amsterdam.

Tim Adams described Ben's very precise technique:

"He first softens the oval of flattened gum a little with a blowtorch, sprays it with lacquer and then applies three coats of acrylic enamel, usually to a design from his latest book of requests that come from people who stop and crouch and talk.

"He uses tiny modellers' brushes, quick-drying his work with a lighter flame as he goes along, and then seals it with more lacquer. Each painting takes a few hours and can last for many years. There is some symbolism in transforming something thoughtlessly spat out into something meaningful."

Litter pickers

Rubbish sacks were heaped up on the pavement outside Barnet Library recently, which were filled with litter collected by members and supporters of the Barnet Residents Association.

Volunteers were kitted out at The Spires shopping centre before heading out across the town.

The clean-up was targeted on locations away from the High Street where there is often an unsightly build-up of litter.

Committee member Wendy Marler, the association's lead on the environment, was on hand to supply green plastic bags and other litter picking kit.

One of the toughest tasks – undertaken by Lynda Horne – was clearing litter from the ditch alongside the cinder track between Byng Road and Cavendish Road.

Among the assorted detritus were over 40 plastic dog poo bags. "Disgusting," said Ms Horne. "Why don't people take them home, and put them in the bin?"

Mike Petersen tackled the verges and pavements around The Spires' car park. He is a veteran litter picker having once found a £5 note and a silver bracelet which he handed in to the Police.

A heap of plastic bags filled with result of their efforts was left ready for collection.

Volunteers ready for the pick-up



DOGGIE TREATS GALORE

"Dogs and cats welcome" is the invitation that awaits customers at Nika, an innovative pet cafe which has opened on Barnet High Street.

Joint proprietors, Hamid Pourrahim and Shadi Rasouli, from Iran, have been overwhelmed with the warmth of the reception they have received, especially from dog owners.

The couple have taken over a former showroom of estate agents Statons and they offer customers the use of an extensive lounge with chairs and tables.

There is a separate menu of doggie treats: donuts, pretzels plus foam – the foam is made from lacto-free milk. "We realise that many catering establishments do not have the space for customers to bring along pets. Some businesses ban them altogether, but we have ample room, and we can also offer a wide range of pet accessories," said Ms Rasouli.



Shadi Rasouli with Mocha



It's all child's play

An elegant, high-ceilinged room in the High Street that was once a dance studio and then snooker hall is now echoing to squeals of delight from children, writes Nick Jones.

A soft-play area has been opened inside the iconic former Montague Burton menswear shop, with its much-admired art deco frontage.

Slides, climbing ropes and a trampoline have been installed on the upper floor. On the opening Saturday the centre was fully booked with proud parents watching on as their youngsters hurtled around the equipment, in and out of the massive structure that transformed the room into a well-padded play centre.

Dean Saeed, proprietor of the Totteridge Gymnastics Club, and his partner Nazbin Begum, hope their new venture will tap into the demand for a safe area for small children to have fun.

Red Stairs Soft Play Centre can accommodate between 20 and 25 children aged up to ten. "We both love working with children and youngsters and it is very exciting for us to find there is such strong

- ▲ Soft sell: High Barnet has previously lacked indoor play facilities for children
- ▲ Foundation stone from 1937 for the Burton's shop
- ▲ Mural artist Sarah Hodgkins hard at work

“ We both love working with children and youngsters - Dean and Nazbin

demand for somewhere warm and safe where toddlers and small children can enjoy themselves," said Ms Begum.

Parents had told Mr Saeed that Barnet lacked facilities for smaller children.

He has secured a ten-year lease on the first floor and with the help of mural artist Sarah Hodgkins of Charlotte Designs he decorated the cafe area where parents can wait while their children play.

Up until the 1980s, the room had been home to the famous North Twenty dance studio, and after conversion for use as a pool and snooker hall, reverted to a dance studio after being restored to its original glory by the Arthur Murray franchise.

The restored dance studio closed last June after failing to make it through the Covid.19 pandemic.

A planning application was submitted to change the use of the upper floor for possible conversion to residential use, but Mr Saeed managed to secure the tenancy.

A spokesman for the American dance chain told the Barnet Society

last year that its Barnet branch had to close because of the requirement during lockdown for dancers to wear masks and visors.

Arthur Murray established his first dance studio in 1912 and the franchise claims it has helped to teach the world to dance – having taught over 35 million people at its dance schools, including celebrities such as Ingrid Bergman, Jane Fonda, Michael Douglas, Madonna, and Clint Eastwood.

The art deco frontage to the building was a feature of many of the Montague Burton menswear shops which were built in the 1930s.

In recent years several of the former shops have been converted for residential use and conservationists have fought hard to ensure that the art deco facades are preserved.

Foundation stones for the shops, all in the same emerald pearl granite that Burton used across the store base, were laid by Montague Burton's three sons, Raymond Montague Burton, Arnold James Burton, and his youngest son Austin Stephen Burton.

Appeal to family historians: daughter seeks 1920s memories of her father



Family history enthusiasts might be able to help in the search for memories, reflections or even photographs of school days in Barnet in the 1920s and 1930s, writes Nick Jones.

Marion Griffin is researching the life of her father John Samuel who was one of three boys and a girl born to a domestic servant at Barnet Workhouse.

All four lived at Guyscliffe Children's Home in Barnet High Street and were under the care of Poor Law Guardians because their mother remained in the workhouse.

During childhood they went to several of the town's original schools, including the former Wood Street and Potters Road Schools, also Cromer Road School in New Barnet, and possibly the former Christ Church School in St Albans Road.

Hertfordshire Archive and Library Services has records of the three boys – George Samuel (1916-1997), John Samuel (1919-1984) and Harry Samuel (1922-2012) – residing at Guyscliffe at 27 High Street, Barnet and attending local schools between 1922 and 1933.

The three boys were all baptised in 1923 at the Barnet Institute and Wellhouse Hospital.

Their sister Betty Margaret Samuel (1927-2015) was born at Barnet Workhouse, and she too is thought to have resided at Guyscliffe with her brothers.

John Samuel was admitted to Guyscliffe from Barnet Workhouse in 1924 and attended Potters Road School until 1931 and was then transferred to Chase Farm Children's Home and School in Enfield.

He spent most of his life living in Barnet with his wife Daisy. He died in 1984

Marion is trying to piece together what it would have been like for her father, his



▲ Marion Griffin and John Samuel (Above) Guyscliffe, which was on the corner of Fitzjohn Avenue

brothers and sister growing up in a children's home and going to school in Barnet.

Early accounts of life in Barnet in the 1920s and 1930s describe how children from Guyscliffe, which was on the corner with Fitzjohn Avenue, opposite the Red Lion public house, joined classes at several nearby schools.

A history of Potters Road School describes class sizes and classroom conditions in 1925 and said they "beggared belief". Lighting and ventilation were quite inadequate, and this had been the regular practice since the admission of "15 extra children from the Poor Law Institution with no extra staff".

Descendants of pupils at these schools might have family memories or mementoes that would give Marion an insight into the early school days of her father, his two brothers and sister.

Their mother, Winifred Samuels, was born in Potters Bar in 1900. She became an inmate at Barnet Workhouse at the age of 16 and worked there as a domestic servant.

Having researched the history of her family, Marion says she thinks this happened because of the shame of being an unmarried mother – which Winifred repeated at the

age of 19, 22 and 27. It was only after her father's death that her mother revealed a family secret: Winifred's father in Potters Bar was the father of his daughter's four children.

"Sadly, every time she went home from the workhouse in Barnet, she was made pregnant again by her father."

Marion said that she and her three brothers had no objection to the parentage of their father becoming public knowledge.

"Many years ago, my mother wrote to the local paper in Barnet looking for relatives of John Samuel. She had a reply from a lady in Potters Bar who turned out to be a cousin of his mother Winifred.

"She happened to know all about the children's parentage and told my mother. I am not sure if my father knew,

"We children were not told any of this until after my father died in 1984 when mum decided that we should know the truth."

Different documents give different spellings of the family name – Samuel, Samuels, Samuells and Samuells.

"I was born Marion Jean Samuels and I have been researching my side of the family for years, but I have only just discovered their link to Guyscliffe."

There are only five years missing from her father's life – from 1933 to 1938. At some point he left Barnet to go to London before joining up in 1940.



SHEILA'S GUIDING HAND Inspirational Girl Guides leader dies at 93, writes Nick Jones

Sheila Hunt will perhaps be remembered most fondly for the 50 years she was captain of the 2nd Barnet Girl Guides in their headquarters at the stable block at Whalebones in Wood Street.

"Mrs Hunt" – as she was always known to generations of Girl Guides – started her career as a qualified Guider in 1960 and became Captain of the 5th Barnet group at Christ Church, St Albans Road, where she stayed for several years before becoming Captain at Whalebones.

Tributes from former Girl

Guides who were inspired by her leadership included numerous descriptions of the way she instilled confidence especially when out camping and when teaching skills such as lighting fires and cooking.

Sheila became a Girl Guide at 11, joining the Poppy Patrol and during the Second World War she became a proficient delivery messenger for the soldiers manning the barrage balloons.

She became a cartographer producing hydrographic surveys for a marine instrument company in the City of London where she met her husband



▲ Happy campers in the 1950s

Ron Hunt. The couple moved to Barnet in 1958 with their two daughters, Shelley and Sharon, and she helped with the preparation and revision of the plans for their house Pegtiles, which her father built for them in Granville Road. Two years later, she became a Guider and rose through the ranks to become camping and arts advisor and later district commissioner.

Her husband Ron, a former Boy Scout, helped her to organise and run Guide camps and events. Many Barnet Guides have fond memories of the trips that she led to the International Guide Centre, Our Chalet, in Switzerland.

"Mrs Hunt had that gift of being able to encourage us to make something of ourselves. She really instilled confidence in us and that was so important," says Jenny Windsor, who enrolled in the 5th Barnet group at Christ Church at the age of 11 when

Mrs Hunt was Captain.

"There really was something special about her leadership. When we were away camping, she knew just how to enthuse girls who might perhaps have been homesick or not very involved.

"We learned so much when she was leading us, about sewing, heraldry, and all sorts of imaginative and useful things which made going to Girl Guides so interesting."

Angela Morris, another former Barnet Girl Guide, recalled a 7th Barnet group camp at Winchester in 1959 where Mrs Hunt was training for her leadership.

"I was 14 and a patrol leader and I remember Mrs Hunt being so enthusiastic. She came to camp with her two daughters, Shelley who was a Brownie and Sharon who was just three."

After retiring from her many roles, Sheila established a Barnet Trefoil Guild for retired Guiders and kept in touch with former guides at the Old Bones group, which was formed after the closure of the 2nd Barnet.

Help the Barnet Society carry on its work by joining.

Annual subscriptions are £8 for an individual or £12 for a family. Additional donations are greatly appreciated.

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