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The Barnet Society

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Invasion of the data centres

Plans are being prepared for a second multi-million-pound data centre to be built on Green Belt fields to the north of High Barnet, next to the M25 motorway, *writes Nick Jones.*

Yet again the proximity of this critical orbital motorway is forcing the pace on nearby future development, eating into the countryside between north London and Potters Bar.

Within less than a year, proposals have been announced for data centres to be constructed in fields next to Junctions 23 and now Junction 24.

The presence of major fibre networks near to the motorway – and easy access to other proposed data centres around the M25 – are said to have influenced the choice of both sites south of Potters Bar.

US tech firm Equinix unveiled plans in February to build a massive £3.9 billion data centre at South Mimms on an 85-acre site to the north of Junction 23.

In early November, a second company, Orbital Data Centres, published proposals for a smaller data centre costing £1.5 billion on a 29-acre site just south of Junction 24 between the motorway and The Ridgeway.

Equinix, which obtained outline planning permission last year, has already started detailed discussions with Hertsmere Borough Council about the infrastructure needed for the centre which would be one of the largest in Europe and would be known as the Hertfordshire Campus.

Local objectors claim the two million square foot development, which would be made up of four separate data centre buildings, would be equal to the size of Wembley stadium and would almost fill the fields between the South Mimms service station at Dame Alice Owen's School, obliterating Green Belt countryside.

The proposed Junction 24 centre, which would be the first to be built by Orbital Data Centres, would require approval from both Hertsmere and Enfield Borough Council as the site straddles the boundary between the two authorities.

Orbital purchased the site, described as dis-used farmland, from Enfield earlier this year and the company hopes to submit its planning application before the end of the year.

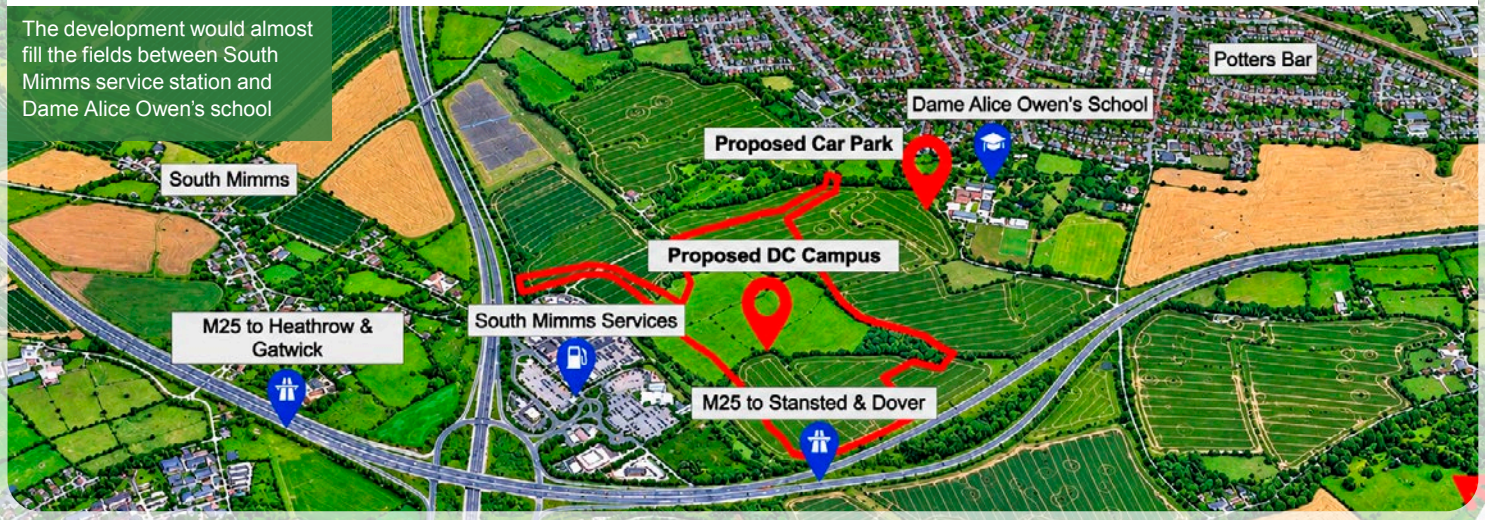
Construction should be completed by 2030 when the centre is scheduled to be supplied with its own electricity grid connection and substation.

At a public presentation of the plan, Orbital said the new centre would not draw from the local electricity network, and it would be cooled with a closed-loop system, which would circulate the same water and not draw on the local mains supply.

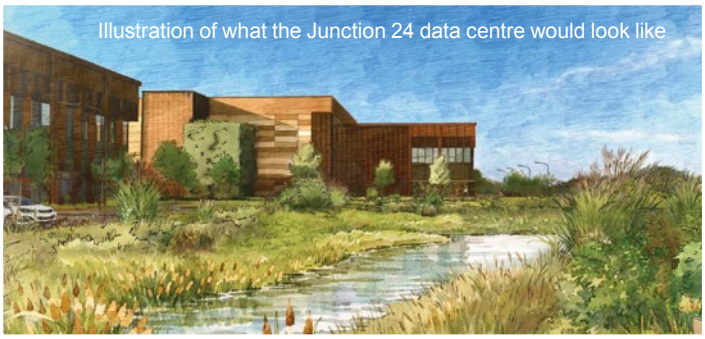
Over half the 29-acre site would remain as open space with wooded, wetland and grassland around the data centre with the addition of 640 new trees. Five acres would be open to the public with footpaths through the site.

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"This has been productive farmland for 250 years. In the future, you can't eat data. We feel that with all these data centres, it is like a juggernaut coming towards us" – Ros Naylor



The development would almost fill the fields between South Mimms service station and Dame Alice Owen's school


Illustration of what the Junction 24 data centre would look like

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Preparation of the site and construction of two data centre buildings would provide 1,400 to 1,700 jobs during the three years of building.

Once in operation, the centre would provide 170 jobs with around 85 more in the wider area.

Orbital calculate that the new centre would provide a £30 million a year boost to the local economy. This would include £6.8 million in business rates of which £2.7 million a year could be kept for local services.

Orbital's planning consultants acknowledged that having to seek planning permission from two separate authorities was a complication.

The western half of the site is within Hertsmere. Although previously Green Belt, the site is now regarded as Grey Belt and has been designated for employment use, which includes data centres.

However, there is a dispute about the status of the eastern half of the site within Enfield.

Under the Enfield local plan, it was originally designated for employment use, but a planning inspector subsequently proposed that designation should be removed as it would result "in a very high degree of harm" to Green Belt land around Junction 24.

In the view of Orbital's consultants, the subsequent declaration by the government that data centres should be considered critical national infrastructure would now have to be taken into consideration, along with the new procedure for redesignating Green Belt as Grey Belt.

Outline planning permission for the much larger data centre near Junction 23 was granted to Equinix in 2025.

It would require 250 megawatts of power – enough to run the equivalent of 200,000 homes – and to meet the demand National Grid is to supply the Hertfordshire Campus with its own connection ready for the data centre to come on stream in 2031.

When Equinix presented their plans at a public consultation, local objectors gathered outside to express their opposition to what they said would be the obliteration of Green Belt land around South Mimms.

Ros Naylor, one of the lead protesters, who presented their case in an edition of BBC One's *Countryfile* in September, said the countryside between Potters Bar and the M25 had been used for decades by nearby residents for walking, riding and cycling along 11 rights of way.

"This has been productive farmland for 250 years. In future, we can't eat data. We feel with all these data centres, it is like facing a juggernaut coming towards us. We have no alternative but to try to stop the loss of our incredibly precious countryside."

At the latest count there are proposals for 94 data centres across Greater London with many of them close to the M25. Among others to be announced this year is a plan for £2.5 billion data centre on an 18-acre site on Tylers Way, Watford.

For more details of the proposed schemes at Junctions 23 and 24 see: *www.junction24datacentre.co.uk*
www.equinixtogether.com/hertfordshire/

Christmas Fayre forced to pay £5,000 for road closures

A last-minute appeal to businesses and supporters has succeeded in raising funds to help meet a bill of more than £5,000 to cover the cost of traffic diversions for this year's Barnet Christmas Fayre on Sunday 6 December.

Barnet Council imposed the charge last year but agreed to waive the fee for the 2025 fayre on the understanding that it would take effect in 2026.

Withdrawal of council funding for the cost of operating traffic diversions around the High Street meant the organisers had to secure minimum funding of £4,700 before covering other costs for holding the fayre.

With only weeks to go the council imposed an additional fee to pay for staff to monitor the traffic diversions and this increased the charge to well over £5,000 for the closure of the High Street and the diversion of traffic via Wood Street, Stapylton Road and St Albans Road.

Local businesses have been encouraged to back the fayre with sponsorship and branding opportunities at the main stage in the High Street and sponsorship of the Christmas Courtyard attractions at the front of Barnet College.

In addition to the main stage, which will be sited in the High Street around the Moxon Street entrance, the organisers have plans for other attractions for families visiting the fayre.



Ros Staines, stalls organiser for the event, said that unfortunately cost-saving measures had been necessary this year.

Instead of supplying covered stalls for charities, community groups and other organisations – a cost of almost £3,000 – stall holders were being asked to bring their own tables, awnings etc.

"We have taken measures to alleviate the road closure charge, and with our last-minute appeal we have ensured the fayre will go ahead."



Principal Su Reddy and assistant principal Tim Goundry

Top marks for Ark's first cohort of sixth formers

Ark Pioneer Academy, which was established in 2019, despite widespread opposition from local campaigners, has seen a high proportion of its first six formers going on to university, *writes Nick Jones*. Since opening on the site of what was once Barnet Football Club's stadium at Underhill, the co-educational, state school, which has over 1,100 pupils, has been consistently oversubscribed.

Principal Su Reddy said she and the staff were delighted that the school achieved A level results well above the national average.

She said: "We are all so proud seeing our first sixth formers moving on to excellent universities, apprenticeships and future pathways."

"We are a consistently oversubscribed, high performing school which sits in well within a borough with one of the highest performances in secondary education."

Four of the outgoing sixth formers have accepted places at King's College, London, three at University College London and places at other universities including Durham, Exeter, Warwick, Southampton and the Royal Northern College of Music at Manchester.

Assistant principal and head of sixth form Tim Goundry said Ark Pioneer was offering what is now their third annual intake of 100 sixth formers a total of 18 A level subjects alongside BTEC diplomas in science or business.

A third of Ark's sixth form students join from other schools around Barnet and Enfield and farther afield.

Four of the students who went on to university secured a bursary to help with their living expenses, an award open to students across the network of Ark academies.

Plans to build a state-funded academy school in Underhill divided opinion a decade ago when the project was announced. Originally, the proposal was for a massive all-age school for 1,680 pupils from nursery to sixth form.

This application was rejected by Barnet Council's planning committee after local councillors and residents argued that the site, which had been purchased by the Conservative government for £14.5 million, was too small for such a large school.

A revised plan for a smaller 1,200-place school was finally approved in October 2017 when Labour councillors, who were still opposed to the impact on the Underhill area of a "super-sized new school", were outvoted by the then Conservative-controlled council.



Illustration of the proposed sports hall

No fun and games for locals beside QE Boys

Residents in roads around QE Boys are objecting to an application to build a new multi-use sports hall.

They fear the four-storey building will dominate the area and generate further traffic congestion.

Above changing rooms on the ground floor, there would be a high ceiling sports hall with layouts for basketball, five-a-side football, badminton and table tennis and on the top floor ten new classrooms.

Sports groups and other community organisations would be able to hire the new facilities during evenings, weekends and school holidays, as is already the case with QE Boys' swimming pool and recital hall.

Residents in the immediate neighbourhood fear that a new sports hall, open seven days a week, all year round, would exacerbate the already "terrible" traffic congestion around the school.

They argue that yet more out-of-hours attractions would only exacerbate what they insist is the failure of QE's administrative staff to tackle uncontrolled parking by parents.

There are regular traffic jams on school days caused by the arrival and departure of a dozen or more coaches and mini-buses transporting pupils from destinations across north and west London and from farther afield.

Disturbance to the neighbourhood continues outside the school week as the swimming pool is hired out at weekends despite a belief by residents that the original planning conditions ruled out use on Sundays.

Alongside the objections registered with the council are comments expressing support for the construction of new sports facilities for the school and wider community use.

Fund raising will start next year if permission is obtained for what the school says is part of a continuing programme to upgrade facilities within its existing site.

Applications will be made for government financial support and sports grants and an appeal launched among ex-pupils. The aim would be to start construction in 2028 and complete the work in 2029.



Planning & Environment

Winter Report by Robin Bishop

Society and sister group BRA are plotting legal challenge

As I write, the agreements required to confirm the Deputy Mayor of London's approval of planning applications for **High Barnet Place** and **Great North Leisure Park, Finchley**, have yet to be signed and published. Meanwhile, our Society and Barnet Residents Association are employing a solicitor and King's Counsel for an opinion on the probability of success if we were to seek a judicial review of the decision.

We welcomed an application to retain the locally-listed Edwardian front block of **63-65 High Street** (former Post Office) for commercial use, and didn't object to the principle of converting the utilitarian rear parts into homes, but regretted the lack of design ambition. Permission has been refused.

The owner of **47 High Street** (Crown & Anchor) is applying for a dining pavilion in its back garden; not a bad idea but out of character with the Wood Street Conservation Area. An application is also in to expand dining at **149 High Street** (Hadley House) with a house for multiple occupation above it. We're minded to object to both.

The outcome of an appeal against the reinstatement of the traditional shopfront at **190 High Street** (Wilkinsons Chemist) is still awaited.

An application for 41 flats plus workspace in **Fortune House** at the bottom of 49 Moxon Street has been approved. We were neutral: it will be only six storeys high,two lower than its previously approved neighbour by the same developer.

Queen Elizabeth's (Boys) School has applied for planning permission for a large sports hall with classrooms above. It wouldn't impact existing greenery, so we haven't commented.

The resident-led **Quinta Project** is campaigning to replace the long-derelict club in Mays Lane with a new, inclusive neighbourhood hub putting local youth at its heart. With wide support from the community, designs by local architect and Society member Simon Kaufman and agreement in principle by the Hadley Trust to fund the acquisition and delivery of the core hub (subject to due diligence and agreed funding terms), Quinta is competing with developers to buy the site from the Council. The winning bid could be announced before the end of 2026.

The last few months have been relatively quiet in and around the town centre, but out in the Green Belt threats multiply, especially in Arkley and beyond. *(See separate story, Page 5)*



Hayley Winton, Arkley resident, and myself

Cheeky tree-cutters try to claim site is in a Grey area

We strongly objected to plans for 12 travellers pitches off **Rowley Lane.** They're in a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation and a Tree Preservation Zone – at least until it was unlawfully cleared of trees last February. The applicant has the nerve to claim that makes it Grey, not Green, Belt. The proposal also breaches national and local planning policies, and would be a poor and unsustainable solution to travellers' needs. Development here would be the thin edge of a massive wedge in the Green Belt between Barnet and Borehamwood. Applications for neighbouring sites in and around Arkley are in the pipeline. The loss of green space west of Arkley would be even more devastating if the Planning Inspectorate upholds an appeal to build 900 homes to the north, on fields between the M25 & Potters Bar, and if a new application for 5,000 homes at Bowmans Cross (N-W of South Mimms) is approved.



Bowmans Cross visualisation

© VISUALISATION BY HTA DESIGN LLP

£200m Arkley land bank

The Mayor of London's target for building 7,000 homes on Barnet's Green Belt highlights the significance of a land bank at Arkley, which is valued at £200 million, writes Nick Jones.

Contractors have painted blue marks on a long line of trees in one 25-acre plot. These are believed to mark plot boundaries. Another plot has a 24-hour security patrol to prevent unauthorised entry.

These plots are part of a 148-acre triangular wedge of woodland and fields to the north of Barnet Road (between The Gate pub at Arkley and Stirling Corner roundabout) and which are bounded by Rowley Lane to the east and the A1 Barnet by-pass to the west.

Online research suggests the area has space for over 1,400 homes. With planning permission, the plots have a potential combined value of £200 million. This is one of the areas suggested for development in the recently published Draft London Plan.

Barnet Council has been told by the Mayor of London that up to 7,000 homes might have to be built on Green Belt land within the borough. Some of the woods and fields in and around Arkley might have to be sacrificed if the target is to be met.

Two other Green Belt sites, which are both off Rowley Lane and which could be re-designated as Grey Belt, are already the subject of planning applications.

This 25-acre site is listed online as being owned by Hallway Properties Ltd, a subsidiary of the William Pears real estate and investment group. It is said to have the potential for 192 homes and an estimated value of £39 million with planning permission.

Another plot of 38 acres closer to the Stirling Corner roundabout includes the cleared site of a former Metropolitan Police sports ground and pavilion. With space for 285 homes, this site could be worth £49 million. It is listed as being owned by Modular Builders Ltd, thought to be part of a property group.

A further 48-acre site closer to the Rowley Lane roundabout, which is listed under the ownership of the Maccabi Recreation Trust, has space for 365 homes and could be worth £56 million. Barnet Council is listed as the owner of a 46-acre stretch of land which has space for 347 homes and a notional value of £71 million with planning approval.

The two requests for planning permission for plots within this triangle of land include an application from Bugler Homes of Rickmansworth to discuss plans for 230 homes and an 80-bed care home on the 17-acre site of a former pig farm off Rowley Lane.

Within the last two years most of the 38-acre site closest to Stirling Corner roundabout has been cleared of derelict buildings which were once part of the former Metropolitan Police sports ground. The Mayor of London has proposed a ten-year target for Barnet to build 32,000 new houses, including 7,000 on Green Belt land within the borough.

In response, the council says any release of protected land should take place only if there is "comprehensive master planning" for the area.

Blue paint on trees are believed to mark out plot boundaries

Here's hoping for a Sebright future



Lex Deak and Ben Dillon

A second High Barnet pub is starting a new lease of life in another successful community-inspired bid to take over a tenancy.

Two former Sebright Arms' customers, Lex Deak and Ben Dillon, who live just round the corner, want to create a community pub with a family friendly atmosphere.

They're following in the footsteps of The Black Horse, which was taken over by three locals five months ago.

The Sebright's new tenants are confident there will be plenty of opportunities for two community-driven licensed premises to prosper.

Over recent years, five pubs have closed in surrounding streets and the message from the new teams running the Black Horse and now the Sebright seems to be that the pubs which will thrive in the future will be those which are orientated towards the needs of the community and local families.

A make-over planned for the yard at the rear of the Sebright will include a covered terrace, planted spaces, a large screen for summer nights and a safe play space.

"What we will be offering at the Sebright is a family-first community pub with a proper play area in sight of the grown-ups, the kind of facilities which will demonstrate how pubs can respond to the family life of today," says Lex.

"Publicans have to adapt by creating a community hub, offering refreshments from coffee in the morning to Sunday lunch, and a venue which welcomes and can host local groups and activities.

"Barnet has a rich history of pubs but there have been closures all around the Sebright and now in an age when people are more disconnected than before, we think it's important to bring people together in a community hub.

"With the Black Horse just down the road, there will be even more reason for people to come out and support their local pubs. We are close friends with the team at the Black Horse and they've been very helpful."

Ben said he and Lex had fond memories of the community spirit which was generated by pubs like the Sebright and they wanted to reinvent that to create a friendly, family space.

"I've lived around here for 30 years and we both knew the Sebright of old."

The Sebright was one of three High Barnet pubs which the Hertford brewers McMullen sold to Punch Pubs and Co earlier this year and the new tenants have taken on an initial lease.

After being closed for several days for redecoration and immediate repairs, the Sebright re-opened for drinks and initial service while the two new tenants work up their plans for what will be a full redesign and refit starting early next year.

Both men are keen to know what locals think about their plans.

In the weeks before the new tenancy was agreed, Chris Nightingale had been working to get the 70 signatures needed to renew an asset of community value designation for the Sebright.

"We are delighted to hear that Ben and Lex are taking over and that the Sebright is back in safe hands.

"The fact we got all the signatures we needed so quickly demonstrates the loyalty of the Sebright's customers."

Nearby pubs which closed over recent decades included The Alexandra in Wood Street, The Albion in Union Street, The White Lion in St Albans Road, and The King William IV and Crown and Anchor in Barnet High Street.

Give *Lex and Ben your opinion: www.thesebrightarms.co.uk*





Red Lion challenge

Stonehouse Pizza and Carvery has ceased trading at The Red Lion after the owners Mitchells and Butler signed up new tenants for one of High Barnet's most celebrated hostelries.

Kitchen and serving staff were offered alternative posts at the Toby Carvery in Borehamwood, another of the company's restaurants.

Rumours about the future of The Red Lion, one of the coaching inns for which High Barnet was once famous, began circulating when it ceased serving food.

Regular customers are wondering whether the new tenants might re-think how to take advantage of the available space in what is the town's largest public house – a prominent three-storey building which includes a ballroom on the second floor long since closed off to the public.

For a time in the 1980s it became the Dandy Lion, but the famous red lion sign was later restored in all its glory to a building which was rebuilt in 1930 by the Meux Brewery to the designs of their in-house architect William Foster and which has grade II status as a listed building.

The Red Lion's position at the top of Barnet Hill meant that in the past it was an important stopping point on the Great North Road. By 1817, 150 coaches a day were passing through High Barnet.

Later "Red Lion, Barnet" became a frequent destination for trams and later buses, but "Barnet Hospital" has taken its place after a bus terminus was established in Wellhouse Lane.

The Red Lion's many claims to fame include two visits by the celebrated diarist Samuel Pepys.

After visiting Barnet Physic Well in July 1664, Pepys had lunch at the Red Lion and after having a further drink at the well, rode home to London.

He returned to the well in May 1667 and went again to the Red Lion, where he famously noted in his diary that he ate "some of the best cheesecakes I ever did eat in my life".

Black Horse fun

Toddlers and parents packed the garden of The Black Horse for a children's Halloween party – just one of the community events held since three former regular customers took over the pub and promised it would become a family-friendly venue.

Pumpkin carving and face painting – plus a supply of hotdogs and toffee apples – proved so popular there was standing room only.

Over the course of the summer there have been a succession of community events at The Black Horse, fulfilling the aim of the new tenants to save the pub and provide a new neighbourly hub for High Barnet.

Simon Anderson, one of three directors of Barnet Community Pubs Ltd, which took on the tenancy of The Black Horse at the end of June, said the support for their Halloween celebration was matched only by the turn out for their party for the partial solar eclipse when the pub bought in 50 pairs of special glasses.

They negotiated a fresh tenancy for The Black Horse with Star Pubs (part of the Heineken group) after it had been closed since the previous September.

Together with fellow directors, Danny Daly and Martin Taylor, the trio began their transformation after completing a speedy refit of the pub in time to take advantage of a summer of near unbroken sunshine.

"We were mobbed during the FIFA World Cup, five deep at the bar," said Danny.

"We are trying to do as many interesting community events as we can – we had a Dolly Parton night and are following it up with a wine and cheese evening. On one charity day we raised £6,000."



Girls remember

A Service of Remembrance on Armistice Day for pupils at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School included a choral tribute by the school choir.

For a second year, pupils assembled on the lawn in front of the school as part of QE Girls' initiative to remind a younger generation of wartime sacrifices.

For recently appointed interim head teacher Stephanie Rodgers it was an opportunity to recall poignant memories around her grandfather's death in the closing stages of World War II.

She read from a letter he sent to her uncle seven months before he died from wounds sustained during fighting in Italy – one of the wartime letters which gained national prominence when included in a VE Day service at Westminster Abbey.

Ms Rodgers said she hoped that by sharing with her pupils an episode from her own family's history, they would recognise that behind every wartime photograph, name and date there was a real person.

A service of memorial at the school was the idea of associate assistant head teacher Mrs Amanda Campbell who wanted pupils to have their own experience of Remembrance Day and Armistice Day.

For The Fallen, a poem by Laurence Binyon, was read by Sophia from year seven, and In Flanders Fields, a poem by John McCrae, was read by Maria from year eight.

In their choral tribute, the choir sang The Parting Glass by the Wailin' Jennys.

After flowers were laid by Air Cadets Lucy from year nine and Ria from year ten, there was the last post and a two-minute silence.





Deputy Lieutenant for Barnet Martin Russell lays the first of the wreaths at Barnet Church

War memories kept alive

In a break with tradition, a service of commemoration was held beside the war memorial at Barnet parish church after the ceremonial wreath laying on Remembrance Sunday.

Because of repairs to the front door of the parish church there was no public access and those attending the ceremony were invited to a service at the nearby Barnet United Reformed Church.

Father Sam Rossiter, team vicar at the parish church, led the service with the support of the full parish and evensong choir, plus choristers, under their director of music Patrick Korczak.

The first wreath was laid on behalf of the King by the Deputy Lieutenant for the London Borough of Barnet, Martin Russell.

Other local dignitaries who stepped forward with wreaths included Councillor David Longstaff (Barnet Vale), representing the Mayor of Barnet, and Dan Tomlinson, the Chipping Barnet MP.

The last post and reveille were sounded by bugler Jonny Tillett, a 15-year-old pupil at Mill Hill School and member of the school's Combined Cadet Force.

Reservists from 240 Transport Squadron of the Royal Logistics Corps led the ceremonial march along the High Street to the church and then returned to their base at the Army Reserve Centre in St Albans Road.

Captain Chandra Pun, a former major of the Gurkhas, led the march and laid a wreath on behalf of the armed services.

A total of 35 wreaths were laid during the ceremony including those from the Royal British Legion, Combined Cadet Forces at Mill Hill and Queen Elizabeth's Boys School, RAF Air Cadets 1374 East Barnet Squadron and Army Cadet Force 218 Barnet Detachment.

Local organisations which laid wreaths included Barnet Museum, Barnet Residents Association, Barnet Society and Jesus Hospital Charity.

Others from the local community included wreaths from staff and players of Barnet Football Club, Barnet FC Supporters Association and staff and players of Hadley Football Club.

High praise indeed for local artists

High praise for entries in their annual exhibition was another boost for the Barnet Guild of Artists as members await completion of their new purpose-built studio.

Art critic Estelle Lovatt was delighted to open what she described as "a very fine, well curated exhibition" of paintings, prints and cards at the Wesley Hall which she said was a credit to the guild.

She expressed her best wishes for another momentous turning point for Barnet's artists as they prepare to leave their present studio at Whalebones, which has been their home for the last sixty years, and move into a new studio on the other side of the Whalebones estate.

Ms Lovatt, art critic for the BBC and lecturer at the Hampstead School of Art, congratulated the guild on having established a real sense of community, welcoming people to the wider family of artists.

"I know you all make a considerable contribution in time and effort to your work, and such is the artistic value of what you do, that whenever people buy a piece of art, they are buying a part of you.



Helen Leake, Barnet Guild of Artists, with Estelle Lovatt, who opened the exhibtion

"Art makes people happy and with the cultural shift towards everything happening on a screen, we need art more than ever because art includes everyone."

Prior to the formation of the guild in 1948, local artists met at the former Abbey Art foundation in Park Road, New Barnet,

After staging their first exhibition at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School, they decided to form a guild and one of the founder members was the late Gwyneth Cowing, whose family established the Barnet Press and who lived in Whalebones House in Wood Street.

Miss Cowing built a studio for the guild's use in 1961 and stipulated in her will that members could use it in perpetuity.

When housebuilders Hill Residential of Waltham Abbey and the Gwyneth Cowing Will Trust were jointly granted planning permission in 2024 to develop the 12-acre Whalebones estate, approval was given for the demolition of the existing timber-framed studio.

Work is well underway building an estate of 115 new homes on the former Whalebones fields opposite The Arkley public house in Wood Street.

Construction of the guild's new studio, which fronts on to Wellhouse lane – opposite the Barnet Hospital bus terminus – is also progressing well and should be completed by January.

Guild membership secretary Helen Leake is hoping they will be able to move into their new premises in the early months of next year.

For more information on the guild see *www.barnetguildofartists.com*

A welcome sight for visitors

"Welcome to High Barnet" declares a brightly coloured mural which it is hoped will provide an eye-catching greeting for visitors

A large mural painted by students at Barnet and Southgate College – which features iconic images of the town – will welcome visitors to High Barnet once a site has been agreed.

Chipping Barnet Town Team decided to commission a welcoming mural as a way of building up the appeal and attraction of the town centre while also strengthening local identity.

Barnet College was keen to get involved in a project which the town team hopes will be the first of other initiatives to engage local students in the life and history of Chipping Barnet.

"What the project has been all about is helping students build up their relationship with Barnet and engage with the town's rich history," said Isabella Tessier, acting art and design course leader, at the unveiling of the mural.

It reflects Barnet's role in the Wars of the Roses – a feature which will connect with medieval banners on display in the High Street each summer – and depicts well known buildings such as the Everyman cinema and Barnet Parish Church.

For the students, it was their first chance to engage in the production and painting of a mural.



Students admire the mural before it finds a permanent home

They were guided in their work by two professional street artists James Titchner and Julian Phethean from the community arts company, Positive Arts.

They were as excited as the students at the official unveiling because it was the first time four separate panels had been lined up together and they could all see the finished mural.

"It has all been so rewarding. The students really enjoyed painting the mural, working collaboratively in this way," said Julian

The mural is in weather-proof paint and will be finished off with a lacquer to protect the colours.

Hot summer takes its toll

All around High Barnet the summer heatwave took its toll drying out ponds and streams filled with surface water, and which are such a popular feature of the town's green spaces.

Joslin's Pond on Hadley Green, where generations of children have fed the ducks, was reduced to an expanse of mud with the duck house beached in the middle.

Brewery Pond, the largest on the green, was much depleted but continued to provide a refuge for ducks, other birds and wildlife. However, fish were not so lucky and carp lay dead on it banks.

Next to the site of what was the former Hadley Brewery, the pond is naturally replenished by local groundwater and springs across the green.

The brewery, which had its own artesian well, opened in around 1700, was demolished in 1978.

London firefighters drew water from the pond in 2025 when fighting a fire which gutted a Georgian property Hollybush House close to the junction with Sydney Chapman Way.

Other smaller ponds on the green dried out completely including a pond close to Old Fold Manor Golf Club.

Another casualty was Gladsmuir pond which borders the Hadley Common roadway.





Councillor Zahra Beg, Mayor of Barnet, joins volunteers at a display of autumn fruit

Community orchard bears fruit

Early next year volunteers aim to start planting what is destined to become a community orchard in Underhill situated in a corner of Barnet Playing Fields, between Ark Pioneer Academy and Grasvenor Avenue.

Along one side of the new orchard will be a freshly-seeded wildflower meadow – another of the initiatives backed by the Orchard Project which organised a display of apples and other fruit at the nearby Rainbow Centre.

Chipping Barnet MP Dan Tomlinson was shown the site of the new Dollis Valley Community Orchard by organiser Daniella Levene and Catherine Watling of the Friends of Underhill Green Spaces, who hope to help maintain the orchard.

There has been some mounting concern locally about the long-term future of Barnet Playing Fields in Barnet Lane, Underhill, following the publication of the London Plan and speculation that the status of Green Belt land could be downgraded to Grey Belt.

Barnet councillors for wards in and around High Barnet say they are keen to contradict misguided claims that protected playing fields and open spaces along the Dollis Valley are at risk of being replaced with housing.

No final decisions had been taken about the future designation of local Green Belt land around High Barnet and whatever the eventual status there was no possibility of the council relinquishing community green spaces for housing.

After being shown the site of the new community orchard, Mr Tomlinson said he looked forward to returning next February when volunteers hope to plant up to a dozen mixed fruit trees including apple, pear, quince and medlar.

"I am confident there is no chance that Barnet Playing Fields will be built on. Our green spaces are so important to the health and wellbeing of our residents. We need to do all we can to enhance their protection."

Councillor Zahra Beg, the Mayor of Barnet – and an Underhill ward councillor – admired a display of autumn fruit. She was delighted to give her backing to the Orchard Project.

"I am proud to be here and support a new community orchard for Underhill.

"Local residents and children will want to see the planting of the fruit trees, and I am sure they will help take care of the wildflower meadow."

Orchard Project communications manager Sarah Cossom said the planting of a wildflower meadow was the first step in building up support and interest in developing a community orchard.

Spring flowers would help with pollination in the area and especially for the new fruit trees.



Dr Majid Saeed outside his dental practice in High Barnet, where he has worked for 20 years

Dentist eases pain of getting an appointment

Hunting for an elusive NHS dental appointment should become easier thanks to software developed by a High Barnet dentist.

On any one day, Dr Majid Saeed estimates there might be up to a dozen or more patients in and around High Barnet who are searching for an NHS dentist without success.

Their plight is mirrored up and down the country because of the lack of dentists undertaking NHS work yet those practices with spare appointments are sometimes unable to fill them in time – a mismatch which Dr Saeed hopes his Odenta platform will address.

Odenta – www.odenta.co.uk – went online in August and is signing up dental practices across the country.

Patients who register with the platform are linked up free of charge with nearby dentists with available NHS appointments and others a distance away if they are prepared to travel farther afield.

Dr Saeed is principal dentist at the High Barnet Dental Practice, which has an NHS contract. He hopes the software he developed will assist the community because he recognises the difficulty people face when seeking an NHS appointment.

Since Odenta's launch he estimates that the platform has found NHS appointments for over 70 patients. Odenta is funded through its ability to find appointments for patients seeking private emergency treatment or other dental work for which a practice pays a booking fee.

"My aim in developing this software is to match patients with available appointments and I wanted to ensure we tackled the pressures people are under when looking for an NHS dentist and help them free of charge," said Dr Saeed.

"Our system is fully automated, so when a practice has spare NHS appointments, patients are informed immediately, by alerts, text or email, so there is an immediate pathway between the two.

"In just four months the response has been so encouraging."

So far well over 50 dental practices have signed up with Odenta and others are joining from as far away as Manchester and Birmingham, as well as from all around London.

Dr Saeed thinks his new platform will be especially welcome in parts of the country where there are no NHS dentists. "NHS practices are expensive to run because NHS contracts have not kept up with inflation.

"They can be challenging, but where Odenta can help is by instantly matching any available appointments with the demand which we know is there and when there are patients prepared to travel who might well find appointments outside their immediate area."

Dr Saeed has been with the High Barnet Dental Practice for the last 20 years and says he is only too well aware of the stress which people can face when struggling to find an NHS appointment.



Buzz about agency

New Barnet has been chosen by Barnet Council as the location for Bumblebee Property, the UK's first local authority owned estate and lettings agency.

Any profits from the venture will be reinvested to help deliver council services.

Based in an office in the shops next to a Sainsbury's store, the new estate agency is a subsidiary of the not-for-profit Barnet Group.

Barnet Group, wholly owned by the council, runs Barnet Homes which manages around 15,000 council homes and leasehold properties across the borough.

East Barnet Road was chosen as the location for Bumblebee Property because there are no other estate agents in the immediate vicinity.

Bumblebee, which provides commercial lettings services for Barnet Homes and other clients, has been operating online for the last eight years.

Opening a high street shop in the heart of New Barnet is described as an important step in bringing the agency's services direct and in person to residents, landlords, buyers and renters, strengthening Bumblebee's presence in the local community.

The agency says it offers personal advice and local knowledge to help people find, let or manage homes across North London and neighbouring areas.

A ceremony was held in East Barnet Road to mark the official opening of what the council says is a commercial business with a social purpose.

Blue Door's Blitz and Beyond!

Everyday life in Barnet during the Second World War was captured in an imaginative production at The Bull Theatre recently, *writes Nick Jones*.

A Nightingale Sang in Barnet: The Blitz and Beyond ran for four sell-out performances, highlighting yet again the ability of the Blue Door Theatre Company to deliver original productions celebrating the town's history and traditions.

Wartime comings and goings among the patrons and staff at the then Barnet Odeon provided a constant thread around which there were scenes and story lines based on family memories and tales about the war years.

Seven members of the company wrote the script and based their contributions on their own research, aided by the recollections of local families.

The playwrights succeeded in bringing together what director Siobhan Dunne said was a patchwork quilt of human stories and dramatic events that occurred literally on their doorsteps in Barnet.

The Odeon cinema – now The Everyman – was chosen to frame the highs and lows for the townspeople of Barnet as they coped with air raid duties, bomb damage, food shortages and the heightened security conditions of the time. All the action was rooted in and around Barnet of the 1940s with storylines that highlighted local street names and places.

A focal point for the play was The Odeon's bomb shelter, which became a regular meeting place for cinema staff, patrons and local people – and a centre of intrigue involving numerous plot lines.

Much of the dialogue revealed the underlying fears within the community, such as the dread of hearing the hum of enemy planes overhead. Interspersed between the family vignettes were renditions of much-loved wartime songs and tunes. Threading the story together against a backdrop of an amazing collection of wartime photographs and clips from cinema newsreels was narrator, Tim King.

The show's finale provided Ms Dunne a chance to thank all those behind the scenes, including her husband Nick Godwin who arranged the music.

She reminded the audience of Barnet's good fortune in being able to deliver live theatre.

She also appealed for contributions towards an emergency appeal for £10,000 towards essential maintenance and running costs at The Bull Theatre. Nearly £3,000 has been raised so far.

Donate at: www.thebulltheatre.com



The full cast of 25 on stage

Join the Barnet Society and help carry on its work

Annual subscriptions for new joiners are £10 for an individual or £15 for a family.

Chair: John Hay, chair@barnetsociety.org.uk
Membership Secretary: Anthony Mak-fan
membership@barnetsociety.org.uk
Website barnetsociety.org.uk
Correspondence: The Chair, Barnet Society,
C/o 31 Wood St, Barnet EN5 4BE
info@barnetsociety.org.uk
Editor: Eamonn Rafferty, raffertye@gmail.com
Designer: Richard Cooke, rtcooke74@gmail.com



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