



November 2007

Friern Barnet and Whetstone Residents' Association

- We are non-political
- We work for all residents in the area
- We discuss issues with Local Councillors and Council Officials
- Associated with the following bodies
 - The Federation of Residents Association of Barnet
 - The Post Office Advisory Panel
 - The Finchley Society
 - Friends of Friary Park
 - The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society
 - Coppetts Wood Conservationists
 - The London Green Belt Council
 - North Finchley Local Agenda 21

CREATION OF AN EYESORE



Those of us who walk or drive along the link between Friern Barnet Lane and Oakleigh Road will have watched with horror or amazement the building of a yellow brick house in Manor Drive (above), which has risen like a sore thumb in the back garden of 101 Friern Barnet Lane.

Astonishingly, this eyesore received permission from a planning inspector who overruled the decision of Barnet's planning committee and ignored the unanimous opposition of the neighbours and your Residents Association.

The effect of this building is overwhelming and our local MP and the Councils appeals and enforcement officer are involved in trying to remedy the impact on the startled neighbours. There was no "hearing" of the appeal, and the ruling of the inspector was unexpected and unreasonable.

The officers of your association are as disturbed about this event as are the planning officers concerned. We can but hope that the co-operation of

the councillors, planning officers, local residents and the Friern Barnet and Whetstone Residents Association will never again be foiled by an outside inspector in the future.

But there is an interesting twist to the story. The new development is in fact even bigger than the Inspector gave permission for. Now the developer has put in an application to retain what has already been built. It appears the Council wants to soften the effect of this overblown development. Your Association will endeavour to give full support to the Borough's desire to uphold planning law.

A recent article in the *Barnet & Whetstone Press* points out "currently gardens count as brownfield land as they have already been developed" and that "permission has been granted to build housing on 142 gardens in the borough since 2004". The resulting buildings do little to solve the Borough's housing shortage but, as Councillor Melvin Cohen states do a lot to "erode the suburban character of the area".

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EDITORIAL: How to overcome unbalanced Planning decisions

When a planning application is recommended by the Council's officers to be approved by the planning committee and is then refused permission by the councillors, the applicant has the right to appeal against that decision.

In due course this appeal will be investigated by a member of the national inspectorate, either at his desk (usually after an inspection of the site) or, in more important or contentious cases, after a public hearing.

At such a hearing the inspector usually has on one side a team representing the appellant and, on the other side, a team sent by the local authority, with possibly outsiders as extras, who may represent local residents on whose behalf they may have opposed the original application.

In our experience, the inspectors are always experienced and knowledgeable people, but their decisions seem, at times, difficult to comprehend. Locally, two such decisions have raised hackles among our members and, so it seems, with many of the councillors involved.

One reason for controversial decisions by an inspector may be the uneven power the two professional opponents carry. In the one corner the developer's team is keenly motivated by their remuneration to overturn the Council's refusal. In the opposing corner the Council's team may have naturally no stomach for a fight. And it is worth noting that the Council officials who meet the Inspector may be the same planning officers whose department recommended for the developers; and, the councillors who voted against the development do not attend the Inspector's meeting.

Thus, instead of putting up a fight, the Council's defence team may indulge in a bit of shadow boxing, then argue over a few minor quibbles and, if this happens, may be content to get knocked out at the first opportunity — this is human and we don't blame the officers; but it does show a vital flaw in the system. A balanced picture can emerge before the inspectors only when the defence of the Council's decision is voiced by people who either were part of making it or are convinced of its justification. The present arrangements too often prevent this from happening.

The officers from the planning department must feel they would let their own team down were they to support the planning committee decision (made exclusively by elected councillors) to refuse the application, if their colleagues had found it worth recommending approval.

We therefore observe that the dice are heavily loaded against the council's ruling surviving such a hearing (although we have succeeded on rare occasions to argue the local authority's case more effectively and successfully than its representative).

This unreasonable imbalance is undoubtedly not a Barnet issue alone. We wonder whether our councillors share our rather pessimistic view of planning decisions sufficiently,

to seek the co-operation of local MPs to have this unbalanced situation reviewed, and addressed by Parliament with a view to changing the planning procedures.

Your Association

Although an impressive number of our members regularly attend our Annual General Meeting and raise issues that concern them, many readers of this newsletter may wonder what we do for them. Well, on your behalf we tackle Barnet Council, public utilities, the local Police and Transport for London. We will support members, individually or as a group, who have reasonable complaints or seek explanations or clarifications of local problems. These may include bus services, planning matters, rubbish collection, vandalism, road maintenance or security.

Your association works in close co-operation with the London Green Belt Council, the Federation of Residents Associations, the Friends of local parks, local councillors and Borough officers and local members of Parliament.

If, therefore, you have problems (many of which may be connected with local authority services and planning issues) or feel, for example, that a matter ought to be aired in the local newspapers, here are the names and telephone numbers of your Residents Association to contact:

Membership	Mrs Lizi Gray	8361 1179
Press	Mr Leonard Bull	8445 7654
Planning	Mr Karl Ruge	8445 4967
Newsletter	Mr Harry Gluck	8368 3562
Friary Park	Mrs Helen Hooper	8445 3118

And if you are prepared to test the water, why not come to one of the next meetings of your Residents Association committee, such as the one on December 5th? Our meetings are open to our members and if you are interested please call either Mr Gluck, Mrs Gray or Mr Ruge for details on time and place.

PLANNING APPLICATION

Application TREN15093A'07 for Underhill ward.

Location: 44, The Croft, Barnet, Hertfordshire, EN5 2TL.

Proposal: 1 x fallen Apple - remove.

Date registered: 5th October 2007. Responsibility delegated.

Applicant: Sarah Metz, 44 The Croft, Barnet, Herts.

APPLE SURPRISE: The London Borough of Barnet recently received this planning application (we kid you not!)

Okehampton celebrates gift made by Friern Barnet benefactor

With such a wet summer behind us, it's difficult to try and think of anything that would bring a warm, summery smile to our faces.

However, there were big smiles on the faces of the five delegates from the Friends of Friary Park over the weekend of 7th and 8th July, 2007. We had been asked to take part in the centenary celebrations for Simmons Park in Okehampton, Devon. Sydney Simmons had given his birthplace the money to buy their park, three years before he funded the purchase of our own Friary Park, nearly 100 years ago.

We were treated like visiting dignitaries from the outset. Amongst the many privileges given to us, we had an exclusive viewing of original 1907

gilt caskets that were presented at the opening of the park, as well as letters and documents; travelled in the observation carriage of a steam train, especially put on for the celebrations and were greeted off that train by the mayor, town clerk and mace-bearers. We were taken in a 1924 Rolls Royce to the local town hall, and then formed part of the official procession to Simmons Park, where we were presented with a scroll confirming the ties of friendship between "the Town Council and Citizens of Okehampton and The Friends of Friary Park". In return, we presented the Mayor with a glass dish, especially engraved to celebrate the centenary.

During the weekend we visited the ruins of Okehampton Castle (which had also benefited from Sydney Simmons' generosity), the museum and paid our respects at Simmons' grave. The local amateur Courtney Players put on an Edwardian musical evening, and throughout the two

days, some of their performers stayed in costume to greet visitors. They even had a 'Sydney Simmons' (played by Stan Stormont). The Saturday evening ended with an enormous firework display and the whole weekend concluded with a Songs of Praise, conducted by the combined local churches and the Bishop of Plymouth.

Cllr. Christine Marsh of Okehampton Town Council had organised a wonderful weekend, together with the mayor, Cllr. Tony Leech, the Town Clerk Don Bent and a myriad of helpers. Particular mention is due to Ros the borrowed town crier!

Yes the weather was wet for the most part, and yes, we had to take shelter in the cream tea tent (!), but the delegates came back home with wonderful memories, loads of new friends and plans to make the centenary of Friary Park in May 2010 an equally wonderful weekend for us all.

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From left to right—the Mayoress and Mayor of Okehampton, and Five Friends from Friern

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS OF FRIERN BARNET AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Wed 28 November
The Mystery of Middle Row
by Richard Selby

Wed 12 December
Christmas Party

All meetings take place at St John's Church
Hall, next to Whetstone Police Station,
Friern Barnet Lane. Starts 7:45 p.m.;
cost £2 to non-members.

Friern Barnet Library

**Join us for coffee and
mince pies and listen to
the children of St John's
Primary School sing
Christmas songs**

Wednesday 12th December
10.30 - 11.30 am., Friern Barnet
Library, Friern Barnet Road

incognito theatre

Mon 19th — Sat 26th
November 2007

Humble Boy
by Charlotte Jones

Performances start at 8 p.m.
Doors open at 7:30 pm.

Incognito Theatre is located in
Holly Park Road (behind the
Health Centre) Friern Barnet,
London N11 3EB
Tickets 0791 287 5700

Green Link between Coppetts Wood and Glebelands vandalised

Trees, bushes, plants stripped away in frenzied attack on nature reserve

The Green Link is the name given to a corridor of land 200 metres wide, made of grass, herbs, bushes and trees which allows wildlife to cross between Coppetts Wood and Glebelands. It is essential for the rich biodiversity on this Nature Reserve of the Borough and is recognised by the Council as having Grade 1 importance.

The Green Link of vegetation has now been destroyed – it is now just bare earth 250 metres long and 200 metres wide. It is a sterile desert. So, the two woods are now losing their rich link of living plants and animals.

The question has to be asked: why is this Green Link now just barren earth? What happened to the grass, herbs and trees?

Scrub is uncontrollable stuff – it is made of grasses, herbs, shrubs and small trees. It is a rich variety of plants that are the food source for a huge population of insects, small animals and larger predators.

All the plants growing here develop flowers. These flowers produce nectar and pollen which are food for bees and butterflies. The insects are food for frogs, shrews and field voles. The frogs shrews and voles are food for owls and kestrels.

There are now no flowers, no grasses, no herbs, no bushes and 50 fewer trees than were planted three years ago. The area is clean and tidy but there is no bio-diversity – the Green Link now has no plants, insects, small animals, bees, butterflies, birds or bats.

It is public knowledge that the Grounds Maintenance crew of Barnet council, whose job it is to maintain the Council's green spaces, cleared this Green Link and left clean bare earth. The Green Link, established at a cost of several thousand pounds of public money, is now gone.

A second issue concerns the destruction of 50 trees and how they were destroyed. According to a report in the *Hendon & Finchley Times* (25th October 2007), a spokesperson from Barnet Council gave the view that it was the work of vandals.

This site is closed at night – two gates, locked at 4 pm prevent any vehicle from entering. Examining the broken tree trunks suggests that the trees were felled by mechanical means. Suggestions that the trees were destroyed by vandals with their bare hands doesn't stand up to analysis. Some of the trunks measure two inches in diameter, which would be impossible to break without some kind of mechanical aid.

Dr Natelson, our Environment Officer, is due to meet with Grounds Maintenance Team and discuss the sensitive management of this site. Hopefully this will lead to more enlightened forms of management of our treasured parks and open spaces.

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A view of Coppetts Wood taken from the Glebelands after it was completely stripped. The Green Link has been stripped of plants and bushes. In maintaining this part of the nature reserve, the Council should have a programme whereby the land is divided into strips and each strip cut-back



One of the broken trees along the Green Link—this one has a diameter of 3.5 cm. Cut marks on the trunk suggesting this tree was felled by mechanical means can be seen to the right of the tape measure.



Look Ma .. no hands!

Residents passing by the old Friern Barnet Town Hall (now a private housing complex and called *The Chambers*) this autumn may have noticed the hands of the clock have been removed. Hopefully, this is a temporary measure and before too long the hands will be put back, and the clock itself restored to working order. The clock had stopped several months before the hands were removed.