

newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



Yet more proposals to give Whetstone's biggest eyesore a makeover . . .

Many residents still refer to it as the Eveready building but its more recent identity has been as Barnet House. It dominates the local skyline as a monument to 1960's Stalinist style architecture. The years have not been kind to it. It has been inadequately maintained and the exterior has weathered badly. It is no longer fit for purpose in terms of 21st century building standards. So something should be done, anything would look better than the status quo.

In recent years it has been the subject of a number of redevelopment proposals, none of which have come to anything. Yet another is now under discussion for this site once again from Meadow Partners whose last application was refused in 2018.

Residents and interested parties were invited to join Meadow Partner's online presentation in February. The proposal that was outlined will deliver the refurbishment and conversion of Barnet House to provide 263 units. These will be housed in the existing tower and a new building on the Baxendale side, which will range from 2 to 7 storeys. Some social housing will be created. The plans will also include 785 square metres of community/ commercial and retail space. To accommodate the new residents some 46 car parking spaces (including disabled) will be provided and a large number of cycle spaces.

The external appearance of Barnet House will include balconies and the plant and equipment currently on the roof will be re-sited in the basement thereby allowing two floors to be added with only a 2 metre overall increase in height.

While there was a lot of detail on the landscaping, ecology and biodiversity of the project, this will come at the cost of the loss of mature trees - especially the oak on the corner of Baxendale on which there is a Tree Preservation Order. A public space will be created on the High Road frontage but essentially the main development will be a gated community.

However, this proposal, as all the others, misses the point. It isn't the redevelopment that residents necessarily object to but the fact that proposals are by



There is nothing good to say about Barnet House. It is dirty, ugly and out of keeping with the surrounding buildings.

necessity presented in isolation of any real impact assessment on the community and the issues most local residents care about.

There was no information on where the new residents who don't have access to any of the 46 parking spots, will actually park. It is ingenuous to say that they won't have cars. Some will. Therefore neighbouring streets, already congested, will bear the brunt of the poor parking facilities on site. Nor is there information on whether and when local infrastructure such as surgeries, dentists, schools and public amenities will be expanded to cope with a further influx of residents.

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continued . . . yet more proposals to give Whetstone's biggest eyesore a makeover . . .

No developer can really address what is actually in the purview of Barnet Council and central government. These developments of "much needed housing" come at a cost to the Council and by extension, tax payers. The developer sells the flats and the Council (i.e. the public purse) is left to stump up for the infrastructure. Guess what happens then.....?

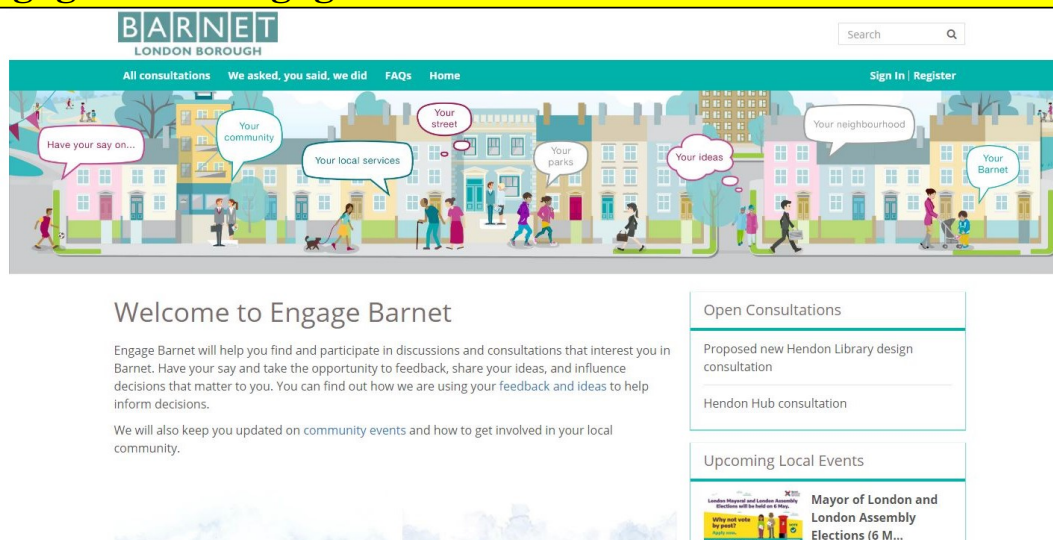
So a makeover of Barnet House is definitely needed and

extra housing too but until there is a better partnership between the developers who answer to their shareholders and the Council, who answers to local tax payers, we will get fancy apartments and a three week wait for a doctor's appointment.

At the time of writing, a Planning Application had not been submitted.

MJ

Do you engage with "Engage Barnet"



Barnet Council use a special website (<https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/>) to conduct various statutory and other public consultations (including some relating to planning policies, but not those relating to individual planning applications). We used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information from the Council about the consultations using Engage Barnet that closed during 2020.

The Council told us that only 19 consultations closed during the year. We had expected more. Some of the surveys related to subjects that potentially affect all, or a high proportion of the Borough's residents (for example, the Council's Budget and the update of the planning policies in the Borough Plan); other surveys are for subjects that will affect just a relatively small number, but which may have much more of an impact on their daily lives (for example, the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones - CPZs).

The survey that received the most responses was, we very much hope, a "one-off", the COVID19 residents' survey, conducted Oct- Dec 2020, with 865 responses. The survey with the fewest responses was about a proposed extension of the duration of Public Space Protection Orders for alcohol related nuisance and anti-social behaviour in the Burnt Oak, Childs Hill and Edgware town centre areas, with just 5 responses.

The "runner-up", in terms of number of responses received was a consultation on charging for parking in

Council parks which had 537 responses, (conducted Jan – Oct 2020- the consultation featured in the report in our January 2021 edition was a second consultation, the reasons for which included concerns about the methodology used in the 2020 consultation).

Interestingly, of the "top 10" in terms of number of responses, 6 surveys related to car parking – 5 were about Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) or waiting restrictions, with responses ranging between 387 - 67 and the sixth was the Council parks survey mentioned above. In contrast, the consultation on the Local Plan (which was 4th overall) had 298 responses and that on the Council Budget had 184.

All of the surveys were advertised, we were told, by links on the Barnet Council main website home page, and whilst the numbers of responses for some surveys is perhaps disappointingly low, it should be recognised that some of the surveys actually relate to quite complex issues and others relate to very specialised issues. Perhaps the Council could find a way to give more publicity to Engage Barnet - the Council told us that only 738 people had registered with Engage Barnet to receive notifications on subjects of interest. Although it isn't necessary to register to take part in the surveys, clearly if you don't know a survey is being conducted you won't respond to it.

DT

Barnet Council's cycle lane scheme revisited

In our January edition we reported on Barnet Council's flagship cycle lane scheme in the High Road between North Finchley and East Finchley. We now have further information, provided to us on 19th March, after the Council internal review procedure accepted FBWRA's argument that this information should have been provided to us with the response to our original request –

Having previously told us that assessing the public response to the scheme and the impact of the traffic signal adjustments and congestion were expected to be completed in March 2021, so that the assessment would be by reference to traffic levels, etc during lockdown, - which would be unlikely to be a valid assessment, the Council now states that data will continue to be collected after March (which is when the 6 month statutory consultation period expired) "in order to reflect, as far as possible, the changes to the traffic network as lockdown eases." Excellent.

We had previously asked for copies of documents relating to the consultation (required under the Covid emergency legislation) by Council officers with the Chairman of the Council's Environment Committee as part of the process for exercising emergency powers, to see to what extent Council officers' proposals were critically reviewed. As regards "critical review", we were now told that *"Meetings in connection with this matter were on an informal basis and not recorded."* However, we were also provided with a copy of a Briefing Note for Councillors dated 28 May 2020, entitled *"Covid 19 – Update on supporting Social Distancing in the Public Realm"* which includes the following statement *"Work to date has included reviewing options for temporary cycle infrastructure across a few routes. Of these, the A1000 potentially presents the most viable option for initial rapid deployment."* (we have added the emphasis).

This shows that the scheme was authorised on the basis that it was to assist social distancing and that it was to be temporary. What need is there for additional social distancing on the A1000 down near the A406? If the scheme was to be temporary, on what basis are Council officers now pursuing a course which could result in the scheme becoming permanent? Whilst the final decision may still lie with Councillors (envisaged to be made no later than



A very wide cycle lane has been installed between the North Circular Road and North Finchley. The original idea may have been for buses and cycles to use this lane but there is not room for both

March 2022), what is the democratic basis of spending time and, more particularly, money, when the authorisation granted was for a purely temporary scheme?

When our January article was written we told our readers that we were waiting for an explanation as to how the Council will ensure that the results of the public consultation on the scheme - (which seems to be based on self-selecting individuals sending emails to the Council's traffic consultations email address - Traffic.Consultations@Barnet.gov.uk) are (A) truly representative of the opinions of the wider local population of road users in the parts of the Borough whose residents are affected by the scheme (i.e. who use or used to use the roads concerned, not merely those who live nearby) and are balanced and objective; and (B) not unfairly skewed by a higher rate of response from particular interest groups (whether, for example, cyclists or residents' associations !!).

We got the answer in late February – *"We can confirm that the standard consultation process was followed which is to notify residents/business we feel would be directly affected by the scheme. Letters were distributed to residents and business located within a selected geographical area. The properties identified were situated directly off of the A1000."* We do not think the Council has answered our question. Perhaps they cannot do so.

FBWRA holds its 2021 AGM using Zoom

We did not want yet another year to pass without getting the regulatory aspects of running the Association approved by our membership. We therefore decided to embrace the technology available and use Zoom to hold the AGM.

Some 30 members logged into the meeting on 15 April. The technology worked well. Members were able to vote on all the

resolutions which were carried unanimously. The Officers and the Executive Committee were all re-elected. Unfortunately it was not possible to have a fully interactive meeting. However, we look forward to a time, hopefully not too far into the future, when we can hold a meeting and properly engage with our Members.

A big vote of thanks to everyone that took part.

The Chairman's Week

We thought that our members might like an insight into a typical week of FBWRA activities for our Chairman –

Monday

Emails - proposed advertising banners on lamp posts; Council Planning Committee structure .
Review reports of planning decisions .
AGM Sub- Committee Zoom Meeting .
Finchley Society (FinSoc) Planning Sub- Committee Zoom Meeting - items discussed included redevelopment of Barnet House, Whetstone, proposed advertising banners on lamp posts.
Prepare and submit Freedom of Information Act - request to the Council about Council Tax records and planning enforcement

Tuesday

Email Committee with report on FinSoc Planning meeting .
Finish writing Report for AGM .
Review weekly lists of planning applications from Council (46 pages); email to Committee with comments; post lists on FBWRA website .
Prepare and submit Freedom of Information Act request to the Council about Barnet House, Whetstone and a request about Barnet's plans for new Controlled Parking Zones) (CPZs), in view of the October 2021 Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) expansion . (FBWRA submits 3 or 4 such requests a month on average .)

Wednesday

Emails on planning matters.

Thursday

Go for a walk - site visit to two properties with planning applications to be considered; email to Council about one application; email to Committee to update .
Check closing date for objections to Whetstone



banners advertising application with Council .

Working on documents for the AGM .

Write report for Committee about the AGM Sub- Committee meeting earlier in the week .

Review Council responses to Freedom of Information Act request about cycle lanes in Finchley High Road.

Friday

Review status of Freedom of Information Act requests to the

Council .

Review note about government housing policy- "densification of the suburbs" .

Emails to Committee members .

Review Council response to Freedom of Information Act request about reviving North Finchley Town Centre .

Saturday

Exchanges of emails with Committee members - AGM documents and planning applications in Whetstone

Sunday

Exchanges of emails with Committee members. Work on documents for Mailchimp email distribution to Members.

Membership of FBWRA costs only £5 per household per calendar year, payable on 1st January. It provides quarterly newsletters, e-mail updates, social events, meetings on local issues, and a chance to influence what happens in your neighbourhood. Application forms from FBWRA.org or from FBWRA Treasurer, 12 Macdonald Road N11 3JB

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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' Associations of Barnet
- The Finchley Society
- Friends of Friary Park
- Open Spaces Society

- The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society
- Coppetts Wood Conservationists
- The London Green Belt Council
- Love Whetstone