

newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



Is Barnet Council suffering from Jekyll and Hyde syndrome?



Cafe society has really arrived in Barnet and has been very much in evidence in Whetstone. In the fine weather there is a definite Mediterranean vibe, especially at weekends, with the throng of residents eating and drinking at the cafe tables. The wonderful mature plane trees add to the atmosphere.

When the easing of lockdown permitted outside eating and drinking again, it provided a welcome boost to many restaurants and cafes throughout the Borough struggling to recover lost business. Outside eating is not a new feature in Whetstone where the wide pavements lend themselves well to this but it is in many other areas. Barnet Council played its part making it easier for establishments to obtain licences to use the pavements. In many places the Council installed planters in the road to designate space for those businesses that needed them, much to the dismay of some motorists.

This improved aesthetic is popular and demonstrated unusual sensitivity by the Council and a proactive

willingness to help local businesses recover. The Council "Town Teams" also played their part. This is in stark contrast with another Council "initiative" of apparently promoting the installation of advertising banners on lamp posts in town centres around the Borough, for example in Mill Hill, Barnet, East Barnet to name a few. This is despite numerous objections both from residents and local Councillors. How democratic is that?

Residents in Whetstone and our MP, Theresa Villiers, objected very strongly earlier this year when news emerged of a planning application to erect 41 advertising banners on lampposts on the High Road - there was no public consultation. Each banner will be 2.2 metre high by 0.78 metre wide. This was part of an application for 147 such banners stretching down almost to the North Circular.

Whetstone residents were concerned that the sheer size and number of them would contribute to a good deal of visual pollution and be an unnecessary

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Continued from Page 1 intrusion. Sitting having coffee or a meal would now be accompanied by a theatre of unwanted advertising banners. What makes these proposals odd is that **it would appear that Barnet is not getting any financial benefit from them. This was confirmed by a Freedom of Information request to the Council.**

So on the one hand our High Streets are becoming more friendly and inviting places to visit in part due to the Council intervention and initiatives; on the other hand much of their atmosphere and improved aesthetic will be



lost and subject to unwanted and intrusive visual pollution -all courtesy of the Council. The body corporate has a split personality.

In the case of Whetstone, a Planning Application for 41 banners has since been reduced to 20 but no feedback has yet been given to over 100 people who objected. It has taken considerable effort to establish that the reduction to 20 was after "negotiations" with the Planning Department, taking into account the objections..... The Planning Officer involved also indicated that their report is now complete and the Application will be recommended for approval subject to a review by a second Planning Officer and then by the Planning Committee. Apparently, objectors will be notified.

Surely the appearance of our streets should be dealt with in a more holistic fashion rather than the piecemeal approach residents are experiencing? What is in it for the Council and therefore tax payers if there is no financial benefit from this? If there is a financial benefit, how is it that the Freedom of Information department doesn't know about it? Where is democratic accountability to those that contribute to the public purse?

What to do about this Jekyll and Hyde performance?

MJ

Council rakes in millions from property developers

A property developer who builds a new building, or extends an existing one, will usually have to pay a tax, "Community Infrastructure Levy", or "CIL", based on the new floor space that is created. This can be substantial and can amount to many thousands of pounds. In London CIL is charged by both the local council and the Mayor of London. The developer may also have to make other payments to meet the cost of specific local improvements needed because of the new development and known as "Section 106 payments" (an example is the funds for the recently installed traffic lights at the junction of Friern Barnet Lane and the High Road in Whetstone).

Using the Freedom of Information Act we have obtained some interesting information from Barnet about CIL payments. It is quite a money spinner. In the 9 years to April 2021 developers in Barnet paid over £114 million, primarily generated by about 900 development projects and these break down to about 250 in the Chipping Barnet Constituency, with the rest divided between Hendon and Finchley and Golders Green constituencies – which reflects the concentration of development activity in the western part of the borough.

Looking more closely at the "FBWRA area", we find an interesting variation between the figures for the Wards of Totteridge (54 CIL projects, total CIL £8.6 million, average £160,000/project), Oakleigh (35 CIL projects, total CIL £2.9 million, average £83,000/

project and Coppetts (27 CIL projects, total CIL £740,000, average £ 27,000).

In Totteridge the Sweets Way redevelopment generated £2.68 million of CIL, the B & Q redevelopment £1.45 million and the 115 new flats being built on Oakleigh Road North (like Sweets Way, former MoD land) £820,000 – about 57% of all the Totteridge CIL. For Oakleigh the biggest contributors were the site of 1060-1072 High Road (opposite the Audi showroom) where the scheme generated £1.3 million and the Well Grove scheme (High Road/Chandos Avenue), with £ 816,000- together 73% of Oakleigh CIL (Note that much of the recent development activity in Whetstone and largely in Oakleigh Ward) has been office to residential conversions, which do not generate much CIL as less new floor space is created). In contrast, the largest scheme in Coppetts was the redevelopment of "The Grange", 68 Friern Barnet Lane, with CIL of £112,000 (15% of Coppetts CIL).

So, where did all the money go? Some went to the Mayor of London (we think about 28%). The rest went to Barnet Council. We asked the Council "What information is held by the Council which analyses/ reports on spending of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts on a geographical basis...?". The answer was concise – "No information is held.." (although they did refer us to some Reports, which we hope to consider in a subsequent article).

DT

Guided Tree Walk

Do you know much about trees? Or not much but would like to know more?

In Friary Park there are some 70 species, and each year arborist Sandra Lea leads a guided walk among them. A City Tree Guide, she lives locally and loves our Park. A mine of unexpected and alluring knowledge, she introduces us, like the perfect hostess, to the personality of a tree.

Weather and Covid rules allowing, the next walk will be on a Sunday afternoon in early September. Details will be posted from mid-August both around the Park and on the "Friends of Friary Park" website.

Once you have registered, your participation is free. Donations are much appreciated, however, as they are funding the labels (also much appreciated) on the trees.

Numbers will be limited for the first time, to 30, because of social distancing and audibility; but if the first date fills, or is rained off, Sandra plans to offer further dates that month.

While checking the website you might like to take a



look at the Trees sections – the Garden, the Pinetum, and the Main Area of the Park - each with its map and introduction to the various species? (On a purely personal note, I enjoy any talk even more if I've knocked a little of the dust off my ignorance of the topic first. I still proudly treasure the memory of being the only one, on the first walk, to recognise the Corkscrew tree. I challenge you!)

YR

TIRED OF POTHOLES

DOG POOP VANDALISM
BROKEN STREET LIGHTING
FLY-TIPPING LOOSE PAVING

Report them to the council with

[FixMyStreet.com](https://www.fixmystreet.com)

When out and about on my constitutional walks during lockdown I often came across issues that "one should tell the Council about", but by the time I get home I had forgotten and life moved on. Then I discovered the FixMyStreet app for your mobile phone. Download it for free from the comfort of your armchair and you are all set to go! It is very simple to use and a great way of getting things done. Reporting an issue takes less than 2 minutes from start to finish.

When you come across an issue which you would like to report to Barnet Council simply open the app:

1. It will show where you are standing on a map, move the big X to exactly where the problem is a press New Report Here. If you are happy where the X is, press Confirm Location

2. It asks if you would like to take a photo, or Skip if not

3. Enter details of the problem in the 3 boxes
- pick a category from the drop down menu which covers most things Barnet Council deal with

- give a title to the issue e.g. "Bins need emptying in Friary Park"
- Give a bit more detail "The bins by the main entrance are overflowing again. They need to be emptied more regularly", then Next
- Type your name, then Report. You can be anonymous or display your name if you wish.

4. FixMyStreet then instantly sends the details to Barnet Council on your behalf.

The Barnet Council Press Office advised me that "these feed directly into our customer service inbox. The enquiry/report is then processed by the Customer Service Hub team and passed through to the relevant Highway Officer for investigation".

I have used it to report graffiti, dangerous trees, abandoned vehicles, fly tipping, overflowing bins and the graffiti coming back. I have to say it seems to work seamlessly and quickly. The graffiti and rubbish/fly tipping teams seem to deal with issues in less than 24 hours!

TS

Four seasons in Coppetts Wood



This site has a mix of habitats; woodlands scrub, grasslands and ponds.



It manages to provide a tranquil retreat for wildlife and people.



There is a nature trail, which will take one hour to complete.



Coppetts Wood Conservationists organise regular tasks on the site and would love to hear from you if you want to get involved or just learn more about the site

The mystery of the Mayfield Avenue traffic signs

For those readers who are unfamiliar with Mayfield Avenue, it lies just off the High Road, to the north of North Finchley town centre. A pleasant, tree-lined road, typical of the area. Earlier this year we were contacted by a FBWRA member whose home is in Mayfield Avenue. He was curious about the “No motor vehicles” signs at the entrances to the road – see picture. We wrote to the Council- in fact, we sent a “Freedom of Information Act” request – because the Council has a legal obligation to reply to such requests.

The reply from the Council came on schedule – the Council records disclosed that “The London Traffic (Finchley and Friern Barnet) Regulations, 1951” imposed a 2.5 ton unladen weight restriction on Mayfield Avenue (and a number of other roads in the area)”, and “We do not have a record of when these signs were first installed or a record of approval for the installation of the signage.” This is rather strange, as our member’s recollection is that the signs only appeared recently- a couple of years ago (and this is also the writer’s recollection).

The Council also told us “These restrictions are not (or no longer) standard weight restrictions and cannot be signed using normal “lorry” restriction signs. Instead they appear to have been mainly signed using a “No motor vehicles” signs with a supplementary plate stating “No vehicles over 2.5 tons unladen except for access”. Fine, but as our picture shows, there is no supplementary plate. Without such a plate the signage is incorrect and falsely indicates that motor vehicles generally are prohibited.

Fortunately for those driving motor vehicles, the signage seems to be unenforced - we were told “Council enforcement of the restriction has not been considered beyond officers noting informally that there would be practical difficulties in doing so.” Quite, if the signage is incorrect.

Puzzled by all this, in early April we emailed the Council Highways department – “In view of the lack of a supplementary plate, is the current signage unlawful? If the signage is unlawful, will the Council



remedy the situation, and, if so, when? Two months later, no response having been received, we sent a reminder – and we are still waiting for a reply.

“Highways” is one of those services that the Council has outsourced to Capita, so perhaps we should not be surprised that our emails are ignored – and a recent Council Finance Committee report notes “ongoing performance issues, notably in highways and estates, that may require a different approach in order to achieve further service improvement”. Quite right. It is time to bring the Highways department back under direct Council control.

Behind what may appear to be a trivial matter of incorrect street signs are two serious points- first, citizens are entitled to know the true extent of any restrictions that may apply to them and, second, those in authority have a duty to respond to legitimate enquiries from the public.

North Finchley Town Centre Redevelopment – Lodge Lane Car Park and a “dash for cash”?

The Council’s plans for the “revitalisation” of North Finchley Town Centre, launched with fanfare a few years ago, but so far showing little progress, in part because the key development partner withdrew from the project, are seemingly about to make a start.

We understand that the first phase of the development will include the Lodge Lane car park and adjacent buildings (Key Opportunity Site 6 in the planning document, the North Finchley Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document, SPD), and that in part this is because the land is wholly owned by the Council and so is more readily available. We expect to see a planning application submitted in the coming months.

It will be important that the proposals deal with the relocation of North Finchley Market from the car park – the SPD states that a new location is required before “delivery” of a redevelopment of the car park – and what arrangements will be made to provide replacement car parking (without which the

redevelopment won’t revitalise North Finchley town centre, instead it will devastate it).

The SPD also requires “that proposals are part of a comprehensive approach in order to avoid piecemeal proposals that are prejudicial to the overall vision” and that “where proposals are for significant developments in the SPD Area, the Council will want to see these brought forward accompanied by an overall masterplan with associated planning application(s), to demonstrate they are part of and/or contribute to the comprehensive regeneration approach.”

As development of the car park could be expected to generate a large amount of money for the Council, it will be most interesting to see whether a genuine “comprehensive approach” and “masterplan” emerge with the plans for Lodge Lane, or whether this is fudged in a “dash for cash” by the Council.

DT



News from Friary Park

Since our last newsletter, Friary Park has been getting back to normal after the lockdown. The mud has gone and plenty of rain has encouraged an abundance of growth.



New flag: To herald the coming of spring and renewed optimism the Friends bought a new Union Jack which now waves proudly from the mast at the end of the drive (see photo).

Park maintenance: The Friends Group keep an eye on the Park by bringing maintenance issues to the Council's attention when necessary. One continuing problem is the damage caused to the verges by the Council's own vehicles.

The wheelbase of the trucks is wider than the footpaths and these cause ugly ruts (see photo).

The staffing of the Maintenance and Green Spaces departments has been drastically reduced due to budget cuts, but whilst the remaining staff do their best to keep things up to standard the results of this are obvious to see in most of the Borough's parks.

Benches: Good things are happening though. The Friends surveyed all the benches in the park and the programme of refurbishing them is well under way together with the rescue of some of the commemorative plaques.

Friends shrub bed: Our own bed on the main drive with a photinia/red robin tree as its centrepiece has gained some new shrubs, and the Friends are considering applying for a community grant to plant out a bare bed in the 'quiet' garden.

Toilets: The constant issue regarding the toilets has been partly alleviated by the appointment of new cleaning contractors.

Graffiti: in the toilets and on the skate park has been brought to the attention of the Council.

Litter: The Council have appointed two maintenance staff to pick up litter four days a week over the summer which is most welcome, particularly after the weekend.

Trees: Sadly, some of the labels describing our unusual trees have been lost or taken but we hope to replace them from our funds. Our next guided tree tour by Sandra Lea is expected to take place in early September. Details will be notified nearer the time.

Tennis: Banners have been pinned on the railings at the tennis courts announcing a requirement to book online. We've spoken to players who say that they are not currently being charged. We also understand that the courts are due to undergo improvement work.

The stream: The abundance of new growth seems to be overwhelming the stream in places and there are fears that some of the less welcome bushes are starting to damage the walls near the bridges.

Volunteers: The Friends are compiling a list of reserve volunteers who can be called upon when there is a project to undertake. If you would like to be on the list please contact our website - friaryparkfriends.wordpress.com and leave a message on our 'contact' page.

Facebook: We have now opened our own page on Facebook to make it easier to connect with Park users. Please visit the site to become a member, just enter 'Friends of Friary Park'.



A deep water-filled rut in the Park caused by the Council's maintenance trucks

RT

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