

# newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



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## Council to sell arts depot, North Finchley Library and car parks



At a Council meeting held last month Barnet Councillors approved proposals for the sale of Council-owned property in North Finchley town centre to property developers, granting authority for a Council official to enter into the agreements.

The properties being sold include the Lodge Lane car park and the Arts Depot. The sales will be by way of 250 year leases. Consequently, we doubt that the operation will affect the sale of the Arts Depot theatre, at least in the short term- an issue which we know is of concern to many.

The property sale has been widely anticipated, in one form or another (see our July edition), but the inclusion of the Arts Depot is a surprise, and we do not know if the flats above and the bus station are included. Also to be "sold" in this way are North Finchley library and most, if not all, of the Council - owned car parks in North Finchley.

The sales will be in phases. The buyer is then meant to develop the land but it seems that there is no obligation to build anything in particular and it is unclear what controls the Council will have over what is built, other than the usual planning controls. Replacing car parking capacity during and after redevelopment seems not to be covered, and would be dealt with as part of the planning process.

The arrangements will also include the Council agreeing to acquire property from existing third party owners under compulsory powers and to sell those properties on to the developer if the current owners will not agree to sell to the developer. Our understanding is that the current owners will not necessarily get a price which reflects the uplift in value from the development proposals, so if that is the case, the Council will in effect be being used as a vehicle to deliver profit to the developers to the exclusion of the current owners.

The Officer's and Legal reports for Councillors for this are, in the writer's opinion, short on detail and leave many questions unanswered. We question whether the Councillors will have had sufficient information to make an informed decision on the proposals - although there is apparently a further legal report that has not been released to the public, which may resolve that issue. Copies of the two reports that we have seen can be found on the Council website at

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocument.s.aspx?Cid=162&Mid=10837&Ver=4> ( Council Meeting 19 October 2021 Agenda).

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## “Where have all the flowers gone?” Gone to car stands, every one.....

Does your car have a future? Unless it's already electric or fairly new, the chances are that it will hit your pocket every time you take it inside the North/South Circular Roads since the expansion of ULEZ on Monday 25th October. The solution would seem to be to replace it right now with one fitting the imminent electric requirement.

Ah, yes, but then what about charging? Well, of course, if you're lucky enough to have a front garden you just convert that into your private car park plus charger. Problem solved.

That solution, however, only worsens a different growing problem, the tidal wave of paving that's already spreading over former green spaces large and small – those massive residential “developments”, family homes rebuilt as blocks of flats, new roads, new rail tracks, gardens... A survey by the Royal Horticultural Society in 2015 showed that half of London's front gardens had already been paved over. How soon before they have all gone? Does this really have to happen?

It shouldn't, and it needn't.

There are at least four good reasons why it shouldn't, given the cumulative impact of your and my and our neighbour's front garden on the treasured “green-ness” of Whetstone and Friern Barnet. They are:

1. Floodrisk. Heavy rainfall is absorbed and held by soil and foliage, but it streams from carpet paving straight into street drainage, which is already easily stressed by a deluge.
2. Temperature Control. Climate change is bringing both that heavier rainfall and summer bouts of sustained heat – heat absorbed by hard surfaces, yielding pleasant summer evenings but uncomfortably close and sleepless nights as well.
3. Pollution. The one joy of lock-down was the disappearance of traffic. Now traffic's back, with a vengeance, and that sweet air is only a memory. I'm comforted that my own frankly wild section of Friern Barnet Lane contributes to the Lane's sadly diminishing foliage competition with CO<sub>2</sub>. (Each new owner...)

4. Wildlife. What happened to the “green corridor” campaign? To that unbroken thread of foliage between gardens? When did you last see a hedgehog, ladybird, or butterfly? What's more, pollinating insects have almost disappeared this year, and that's really worrying.

So, need we risk all that? Not if hard-standing is laid only where the car's wheels will move and come to rest. Cars don't squeeze into corners or up against walls! Blanket paving just for easy maintenance is both unnecessary and, by desiccating the subsoil, risks affecting the house's foundations.

If my garden needed a strip of hard-standing, my choice would be a porous grid, a so-called “grass paver”. The mesh-like interlocking panels (some makes use recycled plastic) sit not on cement but on various grades of gravel topped with soil for grass or any low-growing plants – scented thyme? – and can take the weight of any car without distortion.



A strikingly smart version of this (above) at 46 Park Way caught my eye while I was drafting these notes, so I knocked on the door and was granted an impromptu interview on its properties, installation and maintenance by the wonderfully patient owner. Fascinating! Very briefly, it's called Truckpave (Google it, if you're interested), was of course commercially installed, and needs regular watering at this early stage. He will understand if you pause for a good look!

YR

## Barnet House - update and further questions



News of the submission of a planning application for the redevelopment of Barnet House, on Whetstone High Road, came after the July edition of the Newsletter went to press. Those members of FBWRA who subscribe to our "Mailchimp" emails will have received our emails reporting on the application. For members and readers who do not receive the emails, here is a brief summary and then, for all our readers, an update.

The application is for " redevelopment of the site to deliver up to 260 homes and up to 709 sqm GIA of Class E commercial floorspace through the conversion of Barnet House from offices to residential, including extension at roof level, and the front, rear and side elevations alongside the provision of Class E use at ground floor of Barnet House. And the demolition of rear annex and erection of new residential buildings, together with associated public realm, landscaping, access improvements, car and cycle parking".

The proposal includes just 32 "affordable" residential units -far short of the 35 % Barnet's draft updated planning policies look for in a development of this size. The strategic London Plan looks for overall 50% of new homes to be affordable. There will be only 58 car parking spaces, inclusive of 11 disabled parking spaces.

The FBWRA Planning Sub- Committee considered the application in August and decided that whilst Barnet House is clearly "ripe for redevelopment", the current proposals are not good enough. They are essentially an updated version of the application that the Council rejected in 2018. FBWRA submitted an objection to the Council. We were not alone- a total of 379 public comments were submitted. 363 against, 15 in favour, 1 neutral. Interestingly, the comparable figures for the previous application were 165 comments, of which 161 were against, 3 were in favour and 1 neutral. A significant proportion of the objections mentioned lack of car parking and pressure on local services.

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FBWRA's reasons for objecting included the low level of affordable housing, the preponderance of small flats, the number of flats, which would result in an undue strain on local services, inadequate car parking, the "gated" nature of the proposal, the height/mass of the proposed new build element adjacent to Baxendale, poor internal design, inadequate light to some flats, overlooking, poor waste management and poor sustainability.

FBWRA would like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable assistance given by members of the Finchley Society, who provided a perceptive and authoritative review of the technical design of the proposals, the results of which we incorporated into our submissions to the Council.

At the time of writing the application is still being considered by the Council.

As well as sending our objection to the Council we also asked the Planning Department to comment on some issues with the developer's parking survey that (as required) was submitted as part of the application. The survey was carried out in 2017. Why wasn't a more recent survey required by the Council? There has been

significant local development since 2017. Why was there a departure from the "standard methodology" for such surveys, in terms of the extent of the survey area? In reply the Council told us that they have requested that the developer provides additional parking surveys. Shouldn't they have done that before the application was accepted as "valid"?

We have also requested that, when the planning officers produce their report on the application for Councillors, they include an analysis of the adequacy of the proposed parking provision of just 58 spaces, so that those reading it can see the figures, including the number of cars that the Council considers can reasonably be expected to be associated with the proposed development if it proceeds, and can consider that specific number in the context of the proposed number of parking spaces. Without the benefit of being able to see the figures on the adequacy of parking provision, Councillors will be unable to make a properly informed decision on the application – and perhaps such a decision (whether to approve or refuse consent) would be open to challenge, which would be an undesirable outcome.

DT

## COUNCIL TREE PLANTING IN BETHUNE PARK

Barnet Council have recently carried out a programme of tree planting in Bethune Park. They must have found the money from somewhere! Well done. Our picture shows a planting of pines. On a calm day the air is pleasantly scented. Delightful.

DT



## THE MYSTERY OF THE MAYFIELD AVENUE TRAFFIC SIGNS – PART 2

In our July edition we reported on the mystery of the Mayfield Avenue, N12 "No motor vehicles" signs, and how they were missing what the Council describe as a "supplementary plate" stating "No vehicles over 2.5 tons unladen except for access."

Since writing the July article we have found other roads in the locality with the "correct" signage – for example Friern Watch Avenue – see picture. The Council told us the signs arose due to regulations made in 1951 – seventy years ago. Who would have expected simple traffic signs to have such a long history?

DT



## Planning News

Barnet Council's Planning department publishes weekly lists of planning applications. Members of the FBWRA Planning Sub-Committee review the lists for the FBWRA area and decide whether it would be appropriate to submit an objection to the Council. So far this year we have submitted 15 objections (including for Barnet House), including –

- St John's Church Hall, Friern Barnet Lane, N20 – application for 20 flats (reduced from 26). FBWRA objected to the original proposals. In the summer the developer submitted revised plans, for a 3 storey (reduced from 4) scheme. In September we had a meeting with some of the developer's advisors to discuss the revised scheme. We concluded that although the reduction in the size of the proposed block was welcome, it had too many small flats and our concerns about possible further traffic congestion in Friern Barnet Lane remain, so we have objected to the revised plans. At the time of writing the application is "pending decision" – there were over 76 objections so unless refused by planning officers the application will go to a Planning Committee to be decided by Councillors.
- Advertising banners in Whetstone High Road, N20 (see the lead article in our July edition and also article below) - we objected and publicised the application to our members and others, and many objections followed. The application was withdrawn by the applicant just before it was due to be considered by a Planning Committee. Excellent news!
- 16 Church Way, N20 – application to build 2 detached houses, one on backland behind the other houses on

Church Way. The application was refused by the Council as the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on neighbours and would be out of keeping with the locality.

- Rear of 143 Friern Barnet Lane, N20 – application for a new bungalow at the bottom of 143's garden with access from St James' Close. The application was refused because as a garden land development it would be out of keeping with the local pattern of development and have a harmful impact on the wider area and also because it would be an incongruous and intrusive form of development.
- 82 Beaconsfield Road, N11 – conversion of house into 5 flats. This was a revised application, an earlier one for 6 flats having been refused. We objected on the basis that conversion into 5 flats would be over-intensification and detrimental to the amenity of neighbours. The planning officers disagreed and granted permission under delegated powers (only 3 public objections were submitted. So the application did not have to be decided by Councillors – for the previous application there were 13 public objections, so the decision had to be taken by Councillors, who refused to follow an officer's recommendation to approve).

Readers who wish to see the weekly lists of planning applications for the FBWRA area can do so on the FBWRA website -

<https://www.fbwra.org/recent-planning-applications/>

DT

## We are acting on traffic congestion

Many readers will be well aware of the frequent traffic congestion in "upper Friern Barnet Lane" - between the junction with Myddelton Park and the High Road in Whetstone. This occurs because the road is too narrow for two lanes of traffic, including buses and trucks, travelling in opposite directions between the almost solid parking on both sides. Congestion also occurs regularly in Friern Barnet Road, where long queues of eastbound traffic build up before the roundabout/junction at Betstyle Circus (the BP petrol station).

Earlier this year we asked the Council whether they had any proposals to deal with the congestion. They had none

that seem relevant, so FBWRA'S Traffic and Highways Sub-Committee is developing its own plans, which it hopes to put to the Council at a later date. This will involve putting e-petitions on the Council website and encouraging people to register their support- if we get enough support the petition gets to be considered by a Council Committee and can then get pushed up the "machinery of local government" for action. As the Council is short of money (as ever) we need plans which are not expensive.

For Friern Barnet Lane we intend to start by asking the residents for their views on what ought to be done. This should also provide data on the extent to which on-

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street parking is residents' cars and how much is due to commuters, etc. What seems necessary is a plan which creates at least "passing places" to make it easier for wider vehicles to pass one another.

The problem in Friern Barnet Road also seems to be due to parking, with a 'choke point' between the junction with Station Road and Betstyle Circus. Here the eastbound carriageway is reduced by parking to less than a single lane, so traffic (particularly buses and trucks) on that side are forced to cross the crown of the road into the oncoming traffic until blocked. The result is that the eastbound traffic stream is halted and congestion builds up, often right back to the junction with Friern Barnet Lane/Colney Hatch Lane or even beyond, affecting Woodhouse Road.

The solution for Friern Barnet Road appears to be stronger parking restrictions on a short length of road during peak hours.

Reducing the congestion would reduce fuel use, reduce pollution and reduce traveling times. (Why hasn't this been done already?)

As part of our "plan of campaign", noting that there are Council elections next year, we intend to ask each of the candidates in Whetstone and Coppetts Wards to give us a written commitment that, if elected, they will actively support our proposals.

Please send us any suggestions/comments by email to [fbwra@btinternet.com](mailto:fbwra@btinternet.com)

DT



*Friern Barnet Road - parked cars force eastbound traffic across the crown of the road*

## The Newsletter

This edition of the Newsletter may look a bit different. If so, that's because our esteemed Editor, Harry Gluck, has recently chosen to stand down from the role, although he will remain a member of the FBWRA Committee. The Committee will greatly miss Harry's editorial guidance and his skill in setting up each edition, managing each time to assemble a Newsletter which is both attractive and interesting. Thank you, Harry.

So, we need a new editor – any offers of assistance would be gratefully received. You can email us at

[fbwra@btinternet.com](mailto:fbwra@btinternet.com)

For the time being we have made some interim arrangements so that we can continue to produce the Newsletter for you.

## FBWRA meetings & Covid

We hope to resume physical meetings of the Association in the early part of next year subject to COVID not running riot again, and probably starting with the AGM.

The results of the soundings that the Committee has taken and our own consensus is that this is a step that is not to be rushed.

## Membership

Membership of FBWRA costs only £5 per household per calendar year, payable 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](http://FBWRA.org) or from FBWRA Treasurer, 12 Macdonald Road N11 3JB

## Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association

- We are non-political
- We work for all residents in the area
- We discuss issues with local Councillors and Council officials
- We are associated with the following bodies :-

*Coppetts Wood Conservationists*

*The Finchley Society*

*The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society*

*The London Green Belt Council*

*The Federation of Residents' Associations in Barnet*

*Friends of Friary Park*

*Open Spaces Society*

*Love Whetstone*

## A reprieve for Whetstone High Road ....

When residents became aware of a planning application by Bay Media to erect 41 advertising banners on lamp posts on Whetstone High Road, opposition swiftly built up. Over 100 objections posted on the Planning Portal were supplemented by those from Theresa Villiers, MP and the local Oakleigh and Totteridge Wards Councillors. Despite all this the Planning Officers were still inclined to support the application.....



Notice of the Planning Committee meeting to discuss the application was given to selected individuals with very short notice. Thus is democracy undermined. Vigilance however, paid off and a team was hastily put in place to present counter arguments.

It was therefore a great relief to hear that at the 11th hour, the application was withdrawn. We hope that is the end of this story as far as Whetstone is concerned. Other areas in the Borough, which oppose the banners, may not be so lucky.

Getting to the bottom of the Council's reasons for supporting such a vexatious project has proved difficult. References to a "money-saving scheme" have been seen though quite how the banners would achieve this is unclear.

Apart from being able to use the banners to publicise Council initiatives, any financial benefit must be small. Otherwise this would be hailed as an innovative use of public assets to generate revenue at a difficult time. For many people this might have gone some way towards mitigating the intrusive and environmental impact of the banners. But why can't they just tell us?

We resorted to making a Freedom of Information (FOI) request earlier this year to try to establish whether there was any financial benefit for Barnet. This elicited the response that there was none. However, this response has subsequently turned out to be incorrect and an apology delivered for mis-informing the public. What therefore is the point of the FOI Act when replies cannot be relied upon to provide the "open- government" that it was intended to promote?

## .... and an enhancement to its street scene



Five new benches were inaugurated on Whetstone High Road by the Mayor, Councillor Alison Cornelius and the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers, MP, seen in the photo with Councillor Tom Smith.

The benches carry dedications to the NHS and those who did so much during the pandemic, to those who died in the two World Wars, as well as to the public to enjoy them! Four benches were paid for via a grant awarded to Love Whetstone with the support of Cllr Cornelius and Cllr Smith. A fifth bench was paid for privately.

MJ