

newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



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BARNET COUNCIL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

Barnet Council's Environment Committee met on 13th January. Item 9 on the Agenda was headed "Social Distancing Measures", but in reality it focussed on traffic management arrangements introduced as Coronavirus pandemic emergency schemes. The report to the Committee for Item 9, notes that "Government requirements for schemes introduced as Covid response measures are that wider consultation must take place prior to removal, modification or retention of the scheme." One such scheme is the controversial the A1000 bus/cycle lanes in the High Road between North Finchley and East Finchley (see the articles in our January and April 2021 editions, which are available on our website at

<https://www.fbwra.org/newsletters/>).

The Committee Report explained that further consultation would be carried out but gave information about the result of the initial statutory consultation (Sept 2020 - March 2021) – 515 responses, but just 75 (15%) in support of the scheme and also of post consultation responses (March- Dec 2021) – 96 responses with just 20 (21%) in support- so, overall 16% support. The Report also referenced two online petitions – one against the scheme and the other in favour and stated that "the broadly comparative responses indicate growing support for active travel." [We believe that in plain English "active travel " means cycling and walking.] The "against" petition was supported by 536 people, that "for" by 580. However the Report, on which Councillors would rely in making decisions failed to mention that the "against" petition was only open for 42 days, while the "for" petition was open for 167 days. So, they are not directly comparable. Was the writer of the report being disingenuous? Surely not.

More likely he was simply displaying his own view of what was right, the view of a member of Barnet Council's senior management.

It will be most interesting to see the recommendations of senior management when the final consultation has concluded – to retain (with or without modifications) or remove the scheme.



Hendon Town Hall

This brings me to the main point of this article- the relationship of the Council administrative organisation (not Councillors themselves) with the Barnet community- local residents, Council Tax payers, us.

There seems to be a sense that the Council is increasingly remote from the community and that it only communicates with us when it suits it. There seems to be something of a culture of secrecy on important issues. For example, the North Finchley Town Centre Redevelopment proposals (see our November 2021 edition), where there is much

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uncertainty about what the Council is planning and what it is negotiating with its chosen developer – there seems to have been no attempt to explain to the community just what is intended, the only source of information seems to be obscure Reports and Committee minutes located on the Council's "Democracy" website- why is there nothing on the "News" pages of the main website? That is the website people go to when they are trying to contact the Council or seeking information. Why are consultations "hidden away" on yet another website? There seem to be very few "pointers" between the different websites.

Another aspect of remoteness is that it seems that increasingly Council staff do not live in the community they serve, so they are not in touch with the views of neighbours who are Barnet residents. Of course, this may well be a product of high house prices in Barnet, so it may be unavoidable.

Sometimes it seems unnecessarily difficult to contact a person at the Council. It can be hard to identify an

appropriate individual to contact; the Council's preference is that we should contact it through the website. Email addresses and telephone numbers are commonly withheld.

Further issues are the extent to which the democratically elected Councillors are actually able to exercise control over Council officers in the formulation and implementation of policy and whether the agenda being pursued is that of the Councillors (or, dare one say it, the community) or that of the Barnet Council establishment (some might call it the "Barnet Blob").

FBWRA would like to know what your views are on these issues. You can email us at fbwra@btinternet.com, or you can write to me at 14 Bethune Avenue, N11 3LE.

David Thompson
Chairman, FBWRA

IS THE COUNCIL'S NORTH FINCHLEY DEVELOPMENT PLAN A DEAD DUCK?

In our November edition we reported on Barnet Council's plans to sell Council-owned property in North Finchley town centre, including Lodge Lane car park and the Arts Depot to property developers. The proposals were approved at a Council meeting held in October.

Over the last two months FBWRA has been investigating the proposals-

- The proposals include the sale of the Council owned car parks at Lodge Lane and three other locations in North Finchley. However, there seems to be no information publicly available on what is proposed to replace the lost car parking capacity whilst Lodge Lane is redeveloped. We were told by a senior Council official that the Council had not yet "done the detail" on this - fine, but one would expect the Council to have at least some idea of how the issue would be dealt with. We made a Freedom of Information request – the information was refused on the ground that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. The

response also told us that the Council had a commitment to transparency !

- We saw an email from a leading Councillor sent in early November responding to an email sent to him because of "concern at proposals to sell the land on which ARTS DEPOT is built". The Councillor wrote "I'm afraid the 'sale' of the Arts Depot is a malicious rumour started by our political opponents." Clear enough, you might think. However, it is hard to reconcile this with the Legal Report for Councillors, prepared by the Councils' own solicitors, which clearly refers to the Arts Depot as one of the Council properties to be sold.
- Using the Freedom of Information Act we requested copies of the plans for the Legal Report (at that time these were not in the public domain because, as a Council official informed us, " the plans were missed from the report when it was originally published with the agenda."

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BARNET TOWN CENTRE HEROES EXHIBITION

When I think of heroes, I remember the stories I was told in my youth about men like Hercules, Theseus, St George, David the Shepherd Boy, King Arthur and the wonderful Queen Boudicca. Is it still possible to kill a giant with a stone shot from a sling or find a maiden-eating dragon to slay? Modern day heroes are harder to find or so I thought.

I came across the Discover Barnet campaign which has been instigated by our Borough entitled Barnet Town Centre Heroes. It celebrates the people living in the various areas of Barnet who have gone over and above the call of duty in serving their community during the Covid -19 pandemic. All the heroes were nominated by their fellow community members and on reading their stories, I fully understand why each was nominated and were so deserving of their award.

My delight knew no bounds when I realised that one family who had been so rightly nominated and had received an award lived in The Ridgeway, the road in which I live and better than that, I knew them.



You will all remember that at the start of the pandemic there was a massive outcry about the lack of protective clothing and equipment for the nurses, doctors, ambulance workers, hospital ancillary staff and all those working in the NHS who came into contact with Covid patients.

Big oaks from little acorns grow was certainly true in the story I will now outline.

Chris Grilli was horrified when a doctor friend of his admitted to very real fears about treating seriously ill Covid patients without adequate protection. Chris, an engineer, with the help of his engineering brothers and total support of wife Emily and 3 children created

a method of making high quality visors in their family sitting room. They actually turned part of their home into a small factory which swiftly became a 24 hour non-stop production line as the visors were speedily snapped up by desperate workers who needed them just to be safe performing their so necessary jobs.

Making the visors required 3D printers and cut to size polycarbonate plastic which was hard to find. Nothing deterred this family. They had 2 printers. If they had more, they could produce more visors. Word went round and the WhatsApp Group for the Ridgeway donated money to buy more. So did other WhatsApp groups who heard about the work. Then a Just Giving page was launched. In all, 60,000 was raised to help support and pay for this valuable work. 5 more printers were purchased and finally 10 of them were going night and day, as were the family. More friends joined in, helping with the production line, driving round to deliver the visors as they were sent out immediately and locally to those who needed them.

Fortunately good news travelled fast in this case and Nissan heard about the project. They then made 300,000 masks, which were sold at cost to the government, using the Grilli prototype. A delivery company named Freight Brokers assisted with the delivery of the visors for free. The Grilli Family carried on with their work until it became clear that the authorities were properly supplying hospitals and other medical facilities with the visors they needed.

The family of 5 were totally exhausted by the time their little factory closed down. Exhausted but happily so. Due to their pioneering work, many nurses and doctors were enabled to be SAFE at work which should not have been too much to ask. So, on behalf of everyone who admires what the Grilli Family achieved, I add my thanks and theirs to those they have already received from the Discover Barnet Campaign. They are truly deserving of the award they achieved and I am proud to know them.

The Barnet Town Centre Heroes Award Winners can be found on the internet if you look up Discover Barnet -

<https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/towncentreheroes>

You can read about many more people who went out of their way to help others during the pandemic. You will find the Grilli family in the "North Finchley" section.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS – A DEMOCRATIC RIGHT FOR EVERYONE

FBWRA makes use of the rights granted to everyone under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to obtain information held by public authorities – in our case usually Barnet Council or TfL. We made about 24 requests over the last year, relating to topics such as Council plans (or the lack of them) for highways improvements, guidance to planning officials and plans for charging for car parking in public parks. They are a very valuable tool. In a 1997 White Paper the then government explained that the aim of the legislation would be to facilitate more open government based on mutual trust – “Unnecessary secrecy in government leads to arrogance in governance and defective decision making.”



“Government “ includes local government and public authorities generally, and also executive agencies(e.g. DVLA) and local authority trading companies, such as Barnet Homes and the Act applies to all of them.

The Act covers all recorded information held by such authorities, including drafts, emails and notes, as well as official documents, although some information can be withheld for reasons such as commercial confidentiality, prejudice to effective working, or because it is personal data. Only existing information is covered, so the authority isn't required to create new information to respond to a request.

Authorities are generally expected to provide responses within 20 working days of receiving a request. You can make a request by letter or using the internet/email. Barnet Council has an online form at <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/your-council/open-data-and-information-requests/freedom-information/make-freedom-information> or you can send an email to foi@barnet.gov.uk , whilst the address for sending a letter is “ Freedom of Information Request, London Borough of Barnet, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, London NW9 4EW”. Generally no fee is payable.

Requests must include: your name, an address for communication, whether an email address or postal address and a detailed description of the recorded information that you would like.

Barnet's website gives some helpful advice on how to write a request , including make sure you clearly set out the information you want provided; if appropriate, specify a time period; you have a right to request the information, regardless of how it is recorded. You don't have to specify particular documents; where possible, ask us for specific information rather than using open-ended questions. 'What or 'how much' will lead to better and clearer responses than 'why' and avoid basing your request or question on assumptions or opinions, or mixing requests with complaints or comments.

You are not limited to a single question in a request (but it is best to stick to just one subject), so you can frame a “mini- interrogation”. You might want to try to do this because if you need to go back with a second round of questions you may be waiting for another 20 working days (although sometimes responses come back much more quickly than this).

Finally, please bear in mind that dealing with such requests costs the Council money – our money as Council tax payers.

DT

PLANNING NEWS

NORTH FINCHLEY HOMEBASE PLANNING APPEAL BREAKS NEW GROUND



Image from Taylor Wimpey website

Last October a planning inspector dismissed an appeal by Taylor Wimpey against Barnet Council's refusal of planning permission for a 307-home redevelopment of the Homebase site in North Finchley on design and visual impact grounds. The plans were for a series of buildings rising up to nine floors in height. The inspector had also decided that Barnet could not demonstrate there was a five year supply of housing land in the borough

National planning policies (which inspectors and planning authorities must take into account in making decisions on planning matters) give great weight to a lack of such a supply of land (i.e. a shortage of land). This is often a primary factor in the decisions of planning inspectors in deciding to allow appeals against refusal of planning permission for housing developments.

The Homebase decision is significant as it shows considerations of poor design and excessive visual impact (particularly of tall buildings) can outweigh

the developers' arguments that a development should be permitted because it will provide "much needed homes".

Barnet's planning department recommended the application should be approved, even though existing local planning policies would arguably have justified refusal. Fortunately the Councillors on the planning committee were brave enough to make up their own minds and refused the application – hence the appeal.

We understand that this is one of the first appeal decisions to highlight the increased importance given to the consideration of design by recent changes in national planning policies (the "National Planning Policy Framework" and the government's "National Design Guide"). In the words of the inspector these changes "further place emphasis on granting permission for well-designed buildings and refusing it for poor quality schemes". In his decision he concluded that it "has not been shown that the appeal scheme meets these important criteria which support one of the overarching objectives of the NPPF which is to foster well-designed, beautiful and safe places".

The Homebase case related to a large development site, but we see no reason why its principles should not be applied to much smaller development proposals.

Just before Christmas Taylor Wimpey submitted a revised application for the Homebase site (if at first you don't succeed....). We understand it is not that different from the earlier design, but with fewer homes (250, rather than 307) in blocks of up to seven floors (rather than nine). Our colleagues at The Finchley Society are reviewing the new application in detail- at present there are over 250 objections on the Council planning website – and just two comments in favour. Taylor Wimpey have a website explaining their proposals -

<https://www.taylorwimpey.co.uk/new-homes/north-finchley/north-finchley>

PLANNING NEWS Continued

FRIERN BARNET TELECOM MAST REFUSED PERMISSION AFTER FBWRA CAMPAIGN



Our thanks to those FBWRA members who supported our campaign last month against an application for planning permission for the erection of a “5G” mobile phone mast (“monopole”) in Friern Barnet Road opposite Friern Barnet library, in close proximity to the Church of St. John the Evangelist, which is a listed building - and Grade II*. We opposed the application because we considered that the siting of the mast was sub-optimal in that it would detrimentally affect the view of the church when approaching from east or west. We believed this could be avoided by a minor relocation of the mast of just a few metres. If the proposal had been for a satisfactory location we would not have opposed it- clearly, if society wants to use the

technology the necessary infrastructure has to go somewhere.

The Council planning officer dealing with the application agreed with us and the application has been refused permission -her analysis was that “The proposed monopole, by reason of its excessive height of 16m, siting at a prominent location near listed buildings, would appear as a prominent and visually obtrusive feature within the street scene and surrounding area.” and “ The proposal would have an adverse impact resulting specifically from the 'siting' and 'appearance' of the telecoms equipment proposed.”

BARNET HOUSE REDEVELOPMENT

The developer of Barnet House has lodged an appeal –on the ground that the Council has failed to come to a decision on the application within the statutory deadline, so an independent planning inspector will now decide the outcome.

We also understand that the Council intends to come to a decision at a Committee Meeting on 22 February (after we go to press) although this will now not be binding.

DT

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/>

ABOUT THE BOTTLENECK ON FRIERN BARNET LANE



Our November edition raised the problem of constant traffic bottlenecks, notably on upper Friern Barnet Lane, and our intention to once more put to Barnet Council proposals for tackling this, based on the experience and suggestions of those who live there.

Christmas and Omicron slowed this process down; but in mid-January we delivered 140 individual questionnaires - to almost every household between Myddleton Park and Whetstone High Road plus, for comparison, all those between Myddleton Park and the church/St James Close. A week later we knocked optimistically at each door to collect them.

From a 30% return we gained at least four good things: 1. A consistent and strong – not to say forceful - profile of residents' experience and concerns. 2. The statistics to support this. 3. Some astute and most welcome insights, and 4. The pleasant bonus of chatting with and getting to know many more of our neighbours.

Our questions covered: the assumed reasons for the congestion, its immediate impact, ways of reducing it by altered road layout / patterns of restricted parking / a CPZ, and on-road parking by residents (virtually nil, it emerged, apart from the few with minimal front garden space). Comment was invited, to expand on tick boxes, and was used with vigour, not to say passion. This latter has been particularly revealing, albeit hard to tabulate!

The key findings are:

- The new traffic lights are welcomed but with the strong exception of the disproportionate brevity of the green phase at predictable problem times of the day.
- The new school drop-off/pick-up is perceived as not using the onsite scheme offered in the planning proposal, and is generating ill-will.
- Most of the blockage is from double-sided parking by commuters. There is strong feeling in favour of somehow creating passing spaces for e.g. buses, against becoming a CPZ, and mixed towards no-parking areas. This will clearly remain a battle zone.
- Parked vehicles frequently almost block householders' own access, causing dangerous exits and entrances.
- Exhaust from queues of idling vehicles and impatient horn-blowing are leaving their mark.

Using these findings we shall draw up proposals to put to the Council, and encourage members to respond to our e-petitions when we place them on the Council website.

(The response from the control section below Myddleton Park, not immediately impacted by the congestion, consistently raised a very different but important concern, the speeding of traffic on this section of the Lane. This is a question we shall return to.)

CHAVILLE COURT- NO SOLUTION SO FAR

In our January 2021 edition we reported on the long history of the overflowing sewers outside Chaville Court in Beaconsfield Road, Friern Barnet, and the disgusting conditions that ensue after an overflow. Now it's time for an update.

The problems are still not sorted out. However, there has been progress. Maintaining the sewers is the responsibility of Thames Water. Under pressure from both FBWRA and local MP Theresa Villiers, Thames have been working to find a solution. The problem was not straightforward as water from the surface water drainage system was getting into the foul sewers, making even worse whatever problems there were there. The surface water sewers run through Network Rail (NR) land, whose permission was needed before Thames could send workers onto the land to clean the system and remove blockages. NR let Thames to carry out an initial inspection in January 2021, the results of which showed more extensive investigation was needed. Permission for this took five months to get from NR, who required risk assessments and method statements, revisions, an ecology survey and evidence of badger activity also had to be investigated.

Finally, the work on surveying and cleaning the surface water sewer started in early July. Thames told us that they removed six tonnes of silt and debris and that doing this work meant that surface water can flow through the surface water pipe and not in back up into the foul water sewer, significantly reducing the risk of future flooding. In October Thames completed further work to seal off accesses they had identified between the surface and foul systems.



A flooding event shortly after Christmas 2021 showed that problems still remain- see above.

Now Thames have turned their attention to the foul sewers and recently (January 2022) completed a root cut and lining work in the foul water sewer, outside Chaville Court.

Then a meeting was arranged between Theresa Villiers, a constituent who had raised the problems with her and managers from Thames. FBWRA's Chairman, David Thompson, was also invited and attended - on a bitterly cold January morning. The managers explained what had been done, which was classified as "maintenance" and that they would now be carrying out further work to the foul sewers "downstream" from Chaville Court to look for further blockages and possible collapses that might be causing the problems. They would work away from Chaville Court until they got to the connection with a "main sewer" (perhaps as much as a kilometre away). It is planned to do all this by April. In the meantime they would see if they can fit a flood alarm in a manhole near Chaville Court to give them warning when water levels rose in the sewer so they could attend and deal with further flooding more quickly. We were told that if this "maintenance" didn't solve the problems then Thames would involve its "asset management" team, who would look at what could be done by way of improvements/additions to the system to make it work better.



So- for the moment the case of Chaville Court is not closed. However, to give credit to Thames, they now seem to be pressing ahead with the work- the week after the meeting with Theresa Villiers they had a team busy working in Bethune Avenue, N11, which is on the "kilometre route" mentioned above- see our picture above.

DT

NEWS FROM FRIARY PARK



Photo by Caroline Fleming

January and February are generally drab times but the good news is that our daffodil bulbs are now peeping up above the ground ready for the spring display. The Friends of Friary Park plant about 200 bulbs every year in vacant flowerbeds but the main show can be admired by the gate opposite the church.

The Junior Fun Run is going strong. It's every Sunday morning throughout the year at 9am for children aged 4-14. They can run, walk, hop or skip the 2km course. Contact <https://www.parkrun.org.uk/friary-park-juniors/> If you'd like to help out email Eileen at friaryparkjuniors@parkrun.com

For some time, the Friends group have been dissatisfied with the state of the cafe, both the premises and the way it's run. Complaints have been received from park users but despite approaches to the Council no response was forthcoming. This led to a request under the Freedom of Information Act which did result in a response which was however, less than satisfactory. Apparently it is the leaseholders of the cafe who are responsible for maintenance of the premises while surprisingly there are no conditions set out for the way the cafe is run.

The leaseholder has an automatic right to renew and although the lease expired in 2020 it seems that the Council can do nothing until the leaseholder gives the lease back although it has already expired. Does this make any sense? The Friends will pursue this through the local councillors, and in the meantime visitors will sadly have to put up with what some consider a poor service.



In December the Council rented a grass area near the statue to 'Pines & Needles' for the sale of Christmas trees. This was useful income for the Council and the enterprise seemed to be quite successful for the promoters and was appreciated by some of the park users.

There are to be new rules for hiring the tennis courts. In an effort to raise funds, Friary Park has been selected by the Council as one of the sites where users will need to pay for using the courts which will be upgraded. Arrangements are still being finalised although it seems that the LTA system of booking the courts will be used to operate an online electronic lock on the gate which can be accessed by the hirer. Arrangements are still in hand but this will herald the end of free access to informal use of the courts.

A welcome piece of news is that funding for the refurbishment of the Statue has been received. The money will come from the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy), a levy paid by developers to the Council to improve community assets. This means that in March the statue will be taken away for treatment, and the original spear (as opposed to the current dagger) replaced. All this is hoped to be completed in time for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Whilst the idea of sprucing up the statue is exciting, it's a shame that such funds cannot be used for general maintenance.

RT

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 :-

The Federation of Residents' Associations in Barnet

Coppetts Wood Conservationists

The Finchley Society

The London Green Belt Council

Open Spaces Society

Love Whetstone

The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

FBWRA WEBSITE

We want to give our website a facelift and are looking for ideas from members – please email us at fbwra@btinternet.com if you have any suggestions or would like to be involved.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FRIERN BARNET & WHETSTONE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION AGM

Thursday 7th April 2022

at 7:30 p.m.

(doors open 7:15 p.m.
at St John's Church Hall,
Friern Barnet Road , N11

All Members Welcome

The meeting will be followed by a talk by a
visiting speaker

Note: the above is subject to
Covid staying at bay.

FBWRA SUMMER SPLASH 2022

Sunday 26th June

Friary Park Bowling Club,
Friary Park,
N20 0NR

Further details later

IS THE COUNCIL'S NORTH FINCHLEY DEVELOPMENT PLAN A DEAD DUCK?

- We succeeded in obtaining copies of the plans. Below is an extract from Plan 1 to the Report. Council Land to be sold is shown with red edging. Look at site "L" (identified in the Legal Report as the Arts Depot). Site L appears to comprise the Arts Depot block except for the section (including the flats at 100 Kingsway) fronting Ballards Lane. Well, if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck!



- We asked the Councillor if he would clarify the situation with regard to the "sale" (or otherwise) of the Arts Depot building.
- We didn't get a response directly on the "sale" issue but we also asked "Is the Conservative Group's intention that those agreements [the proposed legal agreements, including that for the land sale] should be signed before the Borough elections in May, or have they already been signed?"

The Councillor wrote "I do not envisage any significant agreements being made before May, not least because Regal [the proposed developer] are yet to make specific proposals and are currently focussing on engagement to inform proposals."



The Borough Council elections are to be held on 5th May. If these result in a "change of control" of the Council will the new controlling Group continue with the current plans? Is the developer holding back on progressing negotiations because it fears there will be a change of control and so doesn't want to spend money on fruitless negotiations?

IS THIS DUCK DEAD ?

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ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP



**If you have paid your sub, that's great.
If you haven't, it's never too late
For the Association just HATES to wait
As your membership we highly rate.**

Annual membership is payable on 1st January with renewal letters sent to all those who had not renewed as at the 8th January. If you are one of the 250 or so that have renewed in January, thank you.

If you have not done so, please can you do so by 28th February.

If you would like a copy of your renewal letter please email

FBWRA@btInternet.com

or call the Treasurer, Tim Smedley on **07782 357345**

WHO LIKES LIVING IN A TRASHY NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Litter is one of the bugbears of our times. It's everywhere as is its associated soulmate, graffiti. It is amazing though how many people either don't even notice it or are complacent about it - it's someone else's problem...

At FBWRA's first Summer Splash several years ago, a member raised this and touched a nerve with the Love Whetstone contingent present. The result was a FBWRA / Love Whetstone leaflet campaign to "Just Do Your Bit". The fond hope was that if everyone cleared up the road immediately outside their home, this would make a difference. It only helped a bit but it did raise some awareness.

PLEASE CLEAR THE LITTER OUTSIDE YOUR HOME
If everyone does this, our neighbourhood will look a lot better

STOP LITTER
JUST DO YOUR BIT!

IS THERE SOMEWHERE THAT NEEDS CLEANING UP? LET US KNOW.

info@lovewhetstone.co.uk
fbwra@btinternet.com

LOVE WHETSTONE
AND
FRIERN BARNET & WHETSTONE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
WORKING TOGETHER

A regular, monthly litter pick then got under way with a handful of local residents who are for the most part Members. This handful now numbers 25 of which up to a dozen regularly turn out. In April it will be four years since we got started.

Our regular litter pickers stress that they are only interested in doing their own "patch" i.e. their own street or a route they regularly take, such as to the station or shops. Regularly cleaning up streets where there isn't a single resident willing to help out pushes their volunteering goodwill a bit far. That means that we regularly cover the same streets. We do respond to requests to clean up other areas and we proactively clean up when we spot a real dump.

Passers by are usually very pleased to see us, though the odd curmudgeon will snipe that "it's the Council's Job". Well, yes, possibly it is. But if our Council Tax can be spent on more important matters, helping out with litter seems a reasonable contribution to our community. Especially as it shouldn't be necessary, if people took their litter home. The Council itself has been supportive supplying equipment, including child-sized litter picking sticks, hi-vis vests, hoops, sacks and gloves.

We meet once a month on a Monday morning and every three months on a Saturday afternoon to allow our working volunteers and those with children and grandchildren to participate. We litter pick for an hour or a full sack. Thus the time commitment isn't onerous either. It also provides useful exercise and a chance to catch up with other residents.

As Spring approaches, Members might like to organise their own litter picking group. Small groups are effective so starting with just two or three people in your neighbourhood will get the job done as well as greatly improve your local environment.

At FBWRA we are happy to help. If you are interested in starting a group and would like more information of how to go about it and how to get equipment etc. or perhaps you just want to distribute the above flyer in your street, please do get in touch at fbwra@btinternet.com

MJ