



Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association

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Chairman's Report – 2021

As I write this Report it seems likely that the 2022 AGM will be the Association's first physical meeting since the Member's Meeting of February 2020 (which heard about Barnet's proposed new Local Plan). That seems to have been a different world, as, indeed, it was. Covid had a great impact on the Association. We could no longer hold physical events- or, even if these were permitted, the Committee concluded that it would be unwise to do so given the profile of our membership and the possibility of a further "wave" forcing cancellation at short notice. The impact and the difficulty of planning anything extended to our Committee meetings. We met exclusively by Zoom until June, when we met in a garden, and then indoors as normal- but in December we were back to Zoom.

Since January this year copies of my monthly reports to the Committee have been posted on our website. These summarise much of our activities and I hope they will have been of interest to you.

Membership

Over the last five years the Association's membership has declined by about 25%. This trend now seems to have halted. One of the effects of Covid has been to prevent us from calling on residents to invite them to join. In an effort to counter this we took the opportunity to use a parking survey that we carried out at new blocks of flats in Whetstone and a distribution of spare copies of Newsletters in new housing developments in Whetstone to draw in new members, with a reasonable success rate. With Covid "now behind us" we hope to continue such efforts.

Communication with members

The Newsletter continues to be our primary means of communicating with members. This is supplemented by emails, sent by "Mailchimp", although we have scaled these back as we found that, if sent too frequently, fewer members open them.

After the July 2021 edition of the Newsletter its Editor (and former Association Chairman) Harry Gluck stood down as Editor. We very much miss his input- particularly his pictures of local life - and his editorial skills. He has no direct replacement and the Newsletter is now "fine tuned" by our printers from a basic draft that we provide to them.

Association activities

Perhaps our longest running issue has been the sewerage problems that afflict Chaville Court in Friern Barnet. There is a report on the problems in the June 2007 edition of our Newsletter (also available on the website). That is very nearly 15 years ago. Still not sorted out. Things move slowly in the worlds of local government and wastewater companies. Last year we, and in parallel, our local MP Theresa Villiers, were pressing for action and finally the problem seems to be being taken more seriously – but for the time being it is still “work in progress”.

Apart from Chaville Court the Association’s other activities have focussed on three principal areas-

- **Planning**

During the year we made representations to the Council objecting to about 15 planning applications, mostly relating to sites in Whetstone- which continues to be the focus for larger development applications in the FBWRA area. Roughly half of these applications ended up being refused by the Council, including proposals for advertising banners on lamp standards in Whetstone High Road, for a telecoms mast near St John’s Church in Friern Barnet (a listed building) and for the redevelopment of Barnet House in Whetstone to create 260 flats and also commercial units. In relation to Barnet House, I would like to thank members of the Finchley Society who assisted us by carrying out a technical review of the design of the proposals. The Barnet House application is now subject to an appeal by the developer.

- **Highways**

The controversial and supposedly temporary A1000 cycle lanes continued to attract our attention as we explored the detail of the Council’s “consultation”, something that is still ongoing. We also started our project to seek Council action to tackle long- standing congestion in Friern Barnet Lane and Friern Barnet Road, and have continued with these this year.

- **Freedom of Information Act**

We make considerable use of the Act to obtain information from the Council bureaucracy, which otherwise often seems only to want to communicate on its own terms. We have noted that some Council departments (for example Highways) are reluctant to communicate, whilst others (such as “Green Spaces”) are more open with us. Many of the results we obtain under the Act find their way into the Newsletter.

The Committee

I must thank all the other members of the FBWRA Committee for their support and advice and for their efforts on behalf of the Association. Tim, Maria, Harry, Yvonne, Richard and Kate – my thanks to all of you. Sadly, Kate has decided to stand down. The Committee is not a “closed shop”. It is small when compared with other local residents’ associations and similar organisations. If we had more members actively involved we could do so much more. The current Committee is fully committed and needs your help. If you’re an activist, that’s great; technically knowledgeable on planning, fantastic, if you can put flyers through doors – that’s splendid – we have something for everyone! We have six officers and committee members and need seven more!! I ask every one of our members to consider whether they could become more involved in our work – **“Your Association needs you”!**