

Report of the Planning Committee for 2016-17

The Planning Committee has been stable in the past year. Peter Pickering is Chairman, Avra Archer Secretary, and every other month Pat Dunnill makes us welcome in Cornwall Avenue, centrally placed for our meetings.

Objective: Our objective is to preserve the local heritage, and conservation character of Finchley, and to support local people in efforts to resist inappropriate development. We are still vigilant to prevent the loss of family houses to flats in the quintessentially suburban areas of Finchley. But the pressure for development in our area has continued unremittingly during the year - the population of London is growing, and if the Green Belt is to be preserved it seems that density will inevitably increase further. It is important that the infrastructure keeps pace.

Procedure: We have monitors for each ward - Mary Hogben for East Finchley, Avra Archer for Church End, Sheila Shannon for West Finchley and Jacques Astruc for Woodhouse, while Peter Pickering looks at that part of Totteridge ward that is within the old borough of Finchley. Other members of the Society and people from Residents Associations and the like keep us informed. We are represented on the Conservation Area Advisory Committee for the three conservation areas in Finchley.

We receive by email from the Planning Department of Barnet Council a list of planning and tree works applications each week, and the monitors study them. Comments are submitted on behalf of the Society by email, letter or direct comment on the Barnet website, and may be followed up with a speaking appearance before the Council committee and by representations to an Inspector if there is an appeal.

Enforcement: We press for enforcement when planning rules have been broken - it is unfortunately becoming more frequent for developers, without planning permission, to demolish or convert existing properties or the applicant has not complied with the permission granted, ignoring it and building something different. The Council's Enforcement Team have not been very robust in getting these breaches rectified – presumably because of the time and cost involved, and the opportunity the developer has of succeeding in an appeal. In the scheme of things the planning department believes the breaches which we have drawn attention to be relatively small. However, in our view such breaches affect the integrity of the area and send out the wrong message to residents and potential developers.

Basements: The building of basements is spreading into Barnet. To date, Barnet Council (unlike some other London councils) has not come up with a meaningful policy. As things stand, if there are no changes to the outside of the building, it can legally be 'permitted development', so that the Council has to grant permission, and as long as the development is started – even just a small excavation – the permission remains valid until the developer decides to complete the work, which could run into many years. Attached properties are then blighted and their future sale made more difficult. The current situation devalues planning laws and ignores the impact on the community.

Cases: During 2016/17, the Committee has had reported to it well over a hundred cases. A contentious one has been the redevelopment of Brookdene on Holden Road; we, and the London Wildlife Trust, objected; councillors twice refused the application against the advice of officers, and

were supported on appeal; a revised application has now been made. The proposal to replace the former Finchley Police Station by a seven-storey building with seventy apartments was refused. All along the High Road above North Finchley there have been a succession of developments, some permitted as change from office to housing, which all need careful scrutiny and some comment.

East Finchley: There has been much activity in East Finchley over the proposals to redevelop the GLH site opposite the tube station. Despite supporting residents in their objections and speaking against at two committee meetings and endless words pointing out contravention to policy, it looks as if we shall not be successful. Meanwhile we wait to see if our opposition to a Shisha establishment, operating without the benefit of permission at the old Alexandra pub in Church Lane in the guise of a restaurant, is successful. More applications have very recently arrived that will certainly change the face of the East Finchley High Road so there will have to be more scouring of documents, policies and drawings and carefully considered words to write.

Consultation: We have been involved in a consultation by Barnet Council on the future of the Finchley Central/Church End area. We do not yet know how the Council will take this forward.

Peter Pickering