

## The Finchley Society

### ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2012/3.

I have great pleasure in presenting the following report that chronicles the work of our Society since April 2012. I use the word 'pleasure' deliberately because it is a pleasure and a privilege to work with so many people who have a love of their local environment and who want to contribute to its well-being. Our last Honorary Secretary, Stephen Hume, attended a Civic Voice conference last May and came home with the distinct impression that our Society was in a better state of health than most. However, we cannot be complacent about our ability to survive and in fact we have gone through a difficult period of reaching out to our membership to bring more people into the inner workings of the Society. I am writing this report in the middle of April just after a goodly number of you have taken a step forward and volunteered to fill some of the gaps in our ranks. The full details of these good people's commitment will be listed in the July Newsletter but it is good to be able to report that both the Environment and the Planning Committees are now nearly up to strength, we have a new Vice-Chairman, a new Programme Secretary, a new Minute Secretary, someone to oversee our presence on Twitter and Facebook and someone to look after audio-visual equipment at monthly meetings. **WE CAN NEVER HAVE ENOUGH VOLUNTEERS - SO DO JOIN THIS SURGE OF SUPPORT AND ENSURE THAT WE CAN FILL ALL THE POSTS THAT ARE NECESSARY TO THE EFFICIENT RUNNING OF THE SOCIETY.**

There is much still to do: we need to expand our social network activities, we need to become more involved with local schools and colleges, with places of worship and clubs. We need to do more in the way of surveys of street clutter and other eyesores, we need to organise litter picking and the tidying up of public flower beds. "Pride of Place" is a good title and a good objective: are we proud of where we live or do we shut our eyes to squalor and neglect and indifference? **IF YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THIS SORT OF ACTIVITY THEN PLEASE TELL US. WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO REMOVE SOME OF THIS TAWDRINESS THAT OFTEN SPOILS OUR LIVES.**

We are also taking a long look at our programme of meetings: do we have too many? too few? at the wrong time? in the wrong place? about the wrong topics? **IF SO, LET US KNOW!**

I must pay tribute to our Archive Team who maintain our collection at Avenue House and who are to be found most Monday mornings sifting through the countless documents, photos and maps that we have acquired in the past 42 years. Their work is much appreciated and is used by visitors. Have you been down to see the collection? I recommend it.

Other unsung heroes are Rosemary Coates and her husband David who incredibly produce a Newsletter of high quality every two months. Communication with our members is essential for the well-being of the Society and we are indeed fortunate to have two such skilful and dedicated members. It is also a good opportunity to thank those of you who contribute articles, both long and short, to make the publication interesting and effective. **IF YOU FEEL MOVED TO WRITE A PIECE FOR THE NEWSLETTER THEN SEND IT IN!**

Let me finish by thanking all our members, both active and waiting in the wings, for their support for the Society during the past year. Without you The Finchley Society would not exist. With your support we can move ahead and tackle the many problems that lie around us. Oh yes: one more request: could you **RECRUIT ONE NEW MEMBER** each between now and December? That would be a wonderful end of year present for us all.

David Smith, Vice-President and Society Chairman.

### REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE:

Our new programme arrangements seem to be going well, some better than others, with more people responding to the afternoon times than the evening ones, and more local issues discussed in different venues around Finchley. We have provided refreshments in answer to members' concerns but unfortunately the payment for this is still not sufficient to cover costs. Sakina Jetha has continued to arrange speakers for the year even though she officially resigned two years ago. We thank her for her devotion to our experimental approach.

One member's resignation brought on a discussion about membership and led to an article in the Newsletter by our Chairman. The member felt unable to continue as she did not read the Newsletter or attend our meetings. We are anxious to point out that membership helps us to work within our aims and shows valuable support which is much appreciated and without which we are helpless. As for our excellent Newsletter, of which we are very proud, we have moved on and this now has colour photos on the front and back pages. We are very pleased to welcome Rosemary Coates, the Editor, to our hard-working committee in the role of Secretary.

We receive many enquiries about houses, shops etc. of the past and asking for references to relatives from people seeking their ancestors. Our archives are well used although we sometimes cannot assist but visitors are always welcome to spend a happy hour amongst our photos and papers. Our thanks to Tony Roberts for his tidy mind and his gathering knowledge. We are also grateful to Peter Marsh for organising the exciting 100 Club, the profit from which provides half of the rent for the archive room.

Our Annual Dinner has become one of our most popular events, last year's being very successful: well attended with a good speaker and a modest profit!

Barbara C Warren. Chairman.

### REPORT FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE:

**PRIVATE EVENTS IN PARKS.** The main environmental issue of the first part of last year was the Council's radical Private Events in Parks Scheme where part or all of a park would be closed to stage a private function. Victoria Park and Lyttelton Playing Fields were included in a total of eight parks within the Borough. When these proposals were first announced there was huge public concern and protest. Three things immediately became apparent: firstly the scheme was hugely unpopular with local residents, secondly, at a proposed hire charge of £250 per day the scheme would not make a profit - in fact it could well end up making a loss - and thirdly, there would be a huge detrimental effect on the presentation of the parks, on wildlife, on other park users and on local residents. The scheme made no sense at all, and council officers admitted they had not costed the scheme and had no intention of doing so. We produced a five-page report highlighting the pitfalls and sent a copy to every councillor and to local MP, Mike Freer. Eventually Victoria Park, Lyttelton Playing Fields, Highlands Gardens and Oakhill Park were dropped from the scheme BUT the Private Events in Parks Policy has been adopted by Council and any park or green space can be included at any point in the future.

Public parks were created in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century as breathing spaces for our rapidly expanding and polluted towns and cities and have, up to this point in time, been free of charge and open to all. We all agreed that this new policy, if implemented, will deprive other park users, cause disruption and nuisance to local residents and wildlife and may set a worrying precedent.

For many months we could not fathom out the *raison detre* for this scheme and we did not know exactly what impact the scheme would have as we didn't know in detail how it would operate. A senior LBB Green Spaces Officer told me in the summer that he had not taken one confirmed booking for any park and had not kept a record of any enquiries. However, when I learned that the contract for managing all the Borough's green spaces and parks was due to be included in the second round of the 'One Barnet' contracts in August 2013 and that the Private Events Scheme was there as a 'sweetener' for private companies it started to make a bit more sense. Council documents already list: corporate and charitable events, car boot sales, fun fairs, circuses, wrestling matches, and so on as being acceptable so this could turn out to be the most serious threat our parks have faced since their inception. The truth is we simply do not know at this stage. We must monitor the situation and hope that this part of the 'One Barnet' scheme does not come to fruition.

#### NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

At one point we were down to just three active members. Much of our energy over the past year was devoted to outreach projects to attract new members and I am pleased to say that this was successful: we now have nine E & T Committee members so we will start the forthcoming year with lots of new energy and ideas.

#### LAND GRABBERS ON DOLLIS BROOK

Many householders have been extending their back gardens on to public land on the west bank of Dollis Brook. This is not a matter of a few inches, it is between 30 and 40 feet per garden. So far the Council has been turning a blind eye even though they have been alerted by local residents. The main area affected is around Windsor Road Open Space. I noticed the problem whilst I was taking photos in the area. I have also been approached by local residents for help. Initially we need to make a survey to see the extent of the problem and we will be working on this with local residents. After this we need to see what can be done to stop this illicit enclosure and reinstate the land as public green space. THE 2012 GREENACRE BICYCLE RALLY

The Finchley Society was the main sponsor of this year's event. The rally was a great success with over 150 cyclists taking to the streets of Finchley. The rally was opened by the Mayor and the cyclists were led off by Theresa Villiers MP who completed the first stage. The second stage took a more scenic and car-free route along cycleways and brooks for a grand finale at Swan Lane Open Space. However, our Council, as yet, has not embraced the Mayor of London's "Cycling Revolution". Even getting cycle stands put outside Tesco's in Ballards Lane is proving well nigh impossible. The Council has axed all cycle training for adults and children in the Borough and has installed cycle barriers on designated cycleways. This could happen only in Barnet. We do not despair, we see this as an ongoing challenge: there is work to be done.

#### SLIDE SHOWS AND WALKS

I have personally devoted much time in the last three years to photographing all the green spaces in and around Finchley and presenting slide shows. The slide shows have proved to be extremely popular and a very effective way of promoting green spaces. Last April I presented an all-new show entitled "The Waterways of Finchley" at Christ Church in North Finchley which was attended by 65 people. The show was repeated at Trinity Church in May and other venues. Many members of the public requested guided walks of the places that had been seen on screen. A series of three "Waterways of Finchley" walks was staged during the summer and also proved popular with well over 20 attending on each Sunday afternoon. We presented another new slide show entitled "The Secret spaces of Finchley" at September's meeting at the Martin School in East Finchley. People have requested more slide

shows and walks and I have compiled an email list of over 60 interested persons. New slide shows and walks are in the pipeline for the forthcoming year.

#### ENVIRONMENT AWARDS AND FINCHLEY IN BLOOM

This Environment Award is a very simple but effective idea: make a note of any activity or feature that enhances the local environment and present a certificate. This will also generate publicity and hopefully encourage other people to be more environmentally aware.

Finchley in Bloom is another idea we are formulating and it will involve more work than the Environment Award but it is a *good* idea and takes over where the now defunct 'Barnet in Bloom' awards left off. We will have to devise categories and invite nominations. Then each nomination will have to be visited and we will have to pick the winners. Both these new ideas are very sound and will, no doubt, help to raise the Society's profile and membership.

#### THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORT DISCUSSION EVENING

In March we invited a panel of experts to answer questions and stimulate ideas and discussion. The evening was a great success. We had a lively debate and covered a lot of topics such as speed limits, buses, cycling and future transport ideas.

Unfortunately, during the evening it became apparent that Barnet Council does not have much of a vision for the future of transport other than 'business as usual' and lags woefully behind all surrounding boroughs in regard to things such as promoting cycling and other forms of sustainable transport. Once again, we will not be dispirited. Life is nothing if not a challenge.

Mike Gee, Chairman.

#### **REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE:**

The Planning Committee has striven, with depleted membership, to monitor planning applications and to engage with the Council on matters of planning policy. We had a constructive meeting with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services in the summer. Most important has been the final adoption, in the autumn, of a new Local Plan (comprising a Core Strategy and a Development Management Document), to replace the old Unitary Development Plan. This new plan was improved over the long period of its preparation - and the Society can take some modest pride in these improvements; we now wait to see how it will be implemented and how it will fare when cases go to appeal. The context is one in which the Government is continuing to relax planning controls, and to reduce the powers of local authorities to support local communities to in their efforts to prevent unsuitable developments.

The Committee has looked at several important cases during the past year. A proposal for the redevelopment of the Furnitureland site was approved in the summer, and is now being implemented. It is better than the previous one, in whose refusal The Society was active, but not quite what we or local residents would have liked. Almost opposite in the High Road is the former police garage: the new owners of the site are engaging constructively with local residents and the Society. We are now being consulted on proposals to redevelop Gateway House in Regent's Park Road. This new willingness of major developers to engage with the community from an early stage, before they submit a planning application. is very welcome.

A Town Team has been set up to meet the challenges of the North Finchley Town Centre. Two members of the Society are involved and we wish them well. We have continued our efforts to hold back the tide of the replacement of family houses by flats in the attractive suburban areas of Finchley. We have met with mixed success - sometimes the Council has granted and sometimes refused applications, and when it

has issued refusals its decision has sometimes been overturned and sometimes supported on appeal.

There have been two cases of importance for conservation areas. One was for the replacement of a window in Glenhill Close, a conservation area whose 1930s architecture has been virtually unaltered since the flats were built, with all of the original doors and windows remaining in situ. The Council's conservation team worked hard to ensure that the replacement was as nearly identical in appearance to the rest as was humanly possible. The other relates to the wall facing College Terrace which Pardes House School, demolished without listed consent. A resolution of this is still awaited.

Mike Dawson has resigned as Secretary of the Committee and we urgently need someone to replace him. He is not leaving the Committee so we are still going to benefit from his hard work although not his secretarial skills.

We should also like to thank Pat Dunnill who has provided the venue for our regular meetings and who will continue to do so until we have enough committee members to make this unrealistic.

Peter Pickering and Carol Halls.

#### **REPORT OF THE PUBUC RELATIONS COMMITTEE:**

The possible yardstick for measuring the success of the PR Committee is the increase or decrease of the membership and to a certain extent the level of attendance at the monthly meetings. I believe there is a net increase in membership but accurate figures are not available at this stage. We obviously met with a measure of success.

We have been unable to attract a permanent Media Officer. Unfortunately our appointee was too busy with his own work due to the economic conditions prevailing and was compelled to resign the position.

A new and improved brag sheet is at the moment "work in progress". It will be in the form of a folder which can be which can be used to hold printed matter to hand to prospective members and for other purposes.

A new version of the membership application form has been printed and is now in use. Unfortunately, the government decided that the previous wording of the gift aid statement had to be changed to a lengthier one which resulted in a reprint.

We are in the process of establishing, in conjunction with the Environment and Transport Committee and Greater London Hire, the establishment of a mobile environmental testing station to test air purity, sound levels etc., the idea being that we can provide on-going information to local newspapers, to our own Newsletter and to other interested parties. This will result in some good PR for the Society and perform a valuable service for the people of Finchley and Friern Barnet.

We have been fortunate inasmuch as Rosie Canning has agreed to handle our on-line social networking area, i.e. Facebook, Twitter and Utube. This is obviously the way to go. It is a bit early to gauge progress at this stage.

We are in the process of revising our station posters. It is felt that our East Finchley poster at the bridge could be in much brighter colours in order to brighten up a dull area. Stan Spinks is now fitter and pursuing new corporate members and chasing those slow in renewing. Our Chairman, David Smith, together with a team of volunteers, intends to hand out Membership forms starting at East Finchley Station.

The Martin School orchard plaque is on hold as there are some massive expansion plans afoot. In addition, its centenary celebrations are scheduled for October this

year. It was hoped that we would be able to combine the placing of the plaque with these celebrations.

We took an interest in the affairs of the Finchley Youth Theatre because there were strong rumours the property was under threat of disposal by the Council. However, Roger Chapman and Stan Spinks were instrumental in helping to revive the Friends of the Finchley Youth Theatre. Roger is now Chairman and Stan is a committee member. They will help us keep an eye on this valuable community asset.

The PR Committee is supporting an arrangement to sponsor and hold funds in a special account for a new group entitled "Victoria Park Tree Project Team" that plans to provide an avenue of oak trees for Victoria Park.

There are plans afoot to encourage the "Support Your Local Traders" theme. The majority of our corporate members are local traders of one sort or another. They provide a tremendous amount of quality service and talent but many of us do not take advantage of it. We will ensure that more information is made available through our Newsletter, website and at meetings.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm and original thinking amongst the members of the PR Committee which bodes well for the future of the Society.

Stan Spinks, Chairman.

#### **REPORT FROM THE SPIKE MILLIGAN STATUE FUND:**

Progress has not been as rapid as we hoped. John Somerville, the sculptor, suffered a stroke last year. Consequently, he was not able to do much work on the full-size model of the sculpture although we were able to call upon the talents of two of John's sculptor colleagues. Work on the model is all but finished now and casting will begin this summer. After further discussions with the Avenue House Estate Trust a new location for the statue has been agreed. It will be positioned on the bank to the south of the tea kiosk. The unveiling is being planned for the spring of 2014. In the meantime fund-raising is continuing with our series of popular quizzes and sales through the website.

David Smith, Secretary SMSF.