

Report of the Planning Committee 2018-19

Membership: Membership has been stable in the past year. Peter Pickering continues as Chairman and Avra Archer as Secretary. We meet every other month and Pat Dunnill makes us welcome at her home. We have developed close relations with the Friern Barnet and Whetstone Residents' Association and their Treasurer, David Thompson, attends our meetings. We have had responses to our appeals for more members, and Mark Lawrence has joined us.

Objective: Our objective is to preserve the local, heritage, and conservation character of Finchley and Friern Barnet, and to support local people in efforts to resist inappropriate development. We are vigilant to prevent the loss of family houses to flats in the quintessentially suburban areas of Finchley.

Procedure: We have Monitors for each ward: Mary Hogben for East Finchley; Avra Archer and Mark Lawrence for Church End; Sheila Shannon and Brenda Barrett 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 keep us informed.

We are represented on the Conservation Area Advisory Committee for the conservation areas in Finchley. Each week we are sent a list of planning and tree work applications by Barnet Council, which the Monitors study. 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.

We press for enforcement when planning rules have been broken. Developers may, without planning permission, demolish or convert existing properties and applicants may, instead of doing that for which they have permission, ignore it and build something different.

Cases: The most common applications are for extensions, loft conversions, rear extensions into back garden; basements (which may pose a particular problem if they are near to a spring line); and adding extra storeys onto blocks, especially along the High Road. There are also applications, which it is hard for the Council to refuse: for conversions of offices to residential under the rules for permitted development, and applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation, which are appropriate in some locations but very undesirable in others. Larger developments in our area are less frequent but can be very contentious. We continue to be surprised, sometimes pleasantly, by some of the decisions by the Council and by Inspectors on Appeal. A particularly interesting saga has been the intention of two separate developers to replace the old Finchley Central Police Station with a large and overbearing block of flats. The first developer pulled out after refusal of planning permission and sold on the site to another. Two further planning applications were made and refused by Barnet Planning Committee - despite officers' recommendations to approve. Both went to appeal and in both the Inspector upheld the refusal - much to the pleased amazement of local residents. This has been a tale of 'Resident Power'. A group of residents who had no experience of planning issues formed themselves into a Residents' Group against the proposals. They kept up the pressure, over a long time, and managed to stop what would have been a horrendously large development - and hopefully achieve a better outcome. We

understand that the developers are now negotiating with the Group to come to some compromise.

In East Finchley, following the granting of approval to the former GLH and Valona House site opposite the tube station, after a very lengthy process of mitigating the worst aspects, the developer tried to slip through a whole additional floor below ground and some changes to the windows as 'non material' amendments. Following pressure this was withdrawn but we remain vigilant. Work has however not yet started and there are real concerns that the developer is waiting for the adjacent Park House, owned by the Council, to come on the market. These two sites together with the entrance to Cherry Tree Wood and directly opposite the listed Tube station are in a key position in the urban landscape.

The new owners of the listed school building in East End Road, formerly the Bobath centre, succeeded in gaining permission for some demolition and rebuilding changes. There are key sites at the top of Church Lane and by Budgens that have been granted approval on appeal, and we wait for work to start. There are additionally two sites providing much needed housing for Barnet Homes that have gained permissions through the year and where work has already commenced.

North Finchley: The Supplementary Planning Guidance was approved by the Council early in 2018, but there has been little to see for it - indeed the promised Partnership Board has not so far materialised.

Locally listed buildings: Barnet Council undertook to review their Local List of Buildings of historic or architectural importance starting in 2017. It is still ongoing. Volunteers, including members of the Planning Committee, guided by a consultant went out to photograph and describe buildings already on the list and to add new buildings of note. These are all now with the consultants and the Council to check, verify and sort into a final list. Once a building is on the list then this should be considered by planners when reviewing any related applications.

Barnet Local Plan: In 2018/9 the Council did not, as had been expected, begin its consultation on the next Local Plan. The new London Plan, with which Barnet's plan will have to be in general conformity, is undergoing 'Examination-in-Public'. We expect Barnet to have to plan for a significantly larger number of dwellings as the need for more new homes becomes ever more urgent, and East Finchley in particular may be targeted for densification.

Peter Pickering
Chairman