

newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



in this issue -

1. *Whetstone Matters*
2. *Friary Park café update*
3. *North Finchley Town Centre Redevelopment - Artsdepot saved amidst drift and uncertainty*
4. *Friern Barnet School street proposals*
5. *Revealed - Membership of group the Council wanted to keep secret*
6. *Friends, Romans, Countrymen.....*
7. *Planning News*
8. *Dates for your diaries*

WHETSTONE MATTERS.....

...to those who live there and really care about the area. It looks and feels like nowhere else in the borough. It's down to the backdrop of those magnificent plane trees, planted in 1994, which lend a continental feel to the wide pavements. Notwithstanding the still traffic-ridden High Road, they have witnessed a cafe society emerging.



It wasn't always like this. The High Road, arguably the centre of Whetstone has undergone quite an evolution over the past few years, some aspects more welcome than others. It is virtually unrecognisable from 30 years ago. It has gone from a very useful, though somewhat unexciting, local shopping centre with lots of retail, many banks and building societies and other services to a rather neglected and seemingly abandoned stretch of road by the mid 2010's. By this time it felt that every other shop had closed, was boarded up or about to be; an affluent suburb at the mercy of graffiti and litter.

But the trees kept on growing and, slowly, more and more restaurants and cafes opened. Love Whetstone came along and installed planters, encouraging others to do their bit



too. They added benches, with the help of the local community and the Council, and instituted a regular litter pick to augment the Council service. It is sad to see how much litter there is and it does not reflect well on Whetstonians and visitors.

The Love Whetstone Christmas Tree has been erected and lights turned on and local schools are singing carols there. This is thanks to the local community, including FBWRA, who have supported the return of this tradition in the past few years.



And now, around a core of good local restaurants and cafes, Whetstone has had its renaissance and is now known as a place to eat out.....if you know where it is.....

MJ

ROS MCKENNY

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing earlier this year of Ros McKenny who with her husband Mac were founder members in 1989 of The Whetstone Society (folded into FBWRA in 2012). Long time residents of Whetstone, she and Mac maintained a watching brief on the Whetstone area. Their achievements would fill this Newsletter and more. She was a founder member of the Oakleigh Gardens Support Group, set up to raise money towards the building of what is now the North London Hospice. Together with Mac, she opened and ran the first charity shop to support the Hospice, raising thousands of pounds over the years for them. The North London Hospice chain of charity shops, now all over Barnet, stem from that original initiative. The Whetstone Society long championed the replacement of trees on the High Road. Successful engagement with the Council resulted in the trees in the adjacent photographs being planted in 1994. They remain a fitting tribute to her.

As Ann Deutsch, a past resident neatly put it, if you tell someone from elsewhere that you live in Whetstone, they will invariably say:-

WHETSTONE? WHERE'S THAT THEN?

North of North Finchley, on an ancient way
First shaped by boot and hoof and chariot wheel,
You'll find this place where travellers rarely stay,
Although they're glad to pull up for a meal.

I'm not the first to put us into verse:
The poet Skelton, in a rhyming fit,
Mentions 'Whetstone atte Barnet' — somewhat terse,
But proof that we're as old as English Lit.

Before books, prehistoric fish — long dead —
Seethed in a lake from Whetstone to Cockfosters.
When that dried, dense primeval forest spread
Where gardens now sport roses, lilies, hostas.

A lucky spot: our one witch was acquitted
At Middlesex Assizes, so we're told;
Hauled up a second time, she was committed —
Not to the rope, but ducking as a scold.

Last before Barnet on the Northern Line,
We're seen as Totteridge's poor relation:
They house the rich and famous — that's just fine:
We're well content to have the shops and station.

The little shops are gone: freed from the stress
Of wondering which local firm to favour,
We swarm to Waitrose and to M&S
For bulk-supplied exotic food and flavour.

On Sundays, Christ Church, Mary Mag (RC),
St John's and All Saints' call the faithful few
To worship, while a different piety
Draws men to Home Base and to B&Q.

So that's us — not much better than our brothers;
Screened by the High Road from the general stare —
The kind of place that's in between some others;
A place that's on the way from there to there.

EXTRACT FROM FRIENDS OF FRIARY PARK NEWSLETTER



Friary Park café update

Following a tender process the council has appointed Katia to run Friary Park cafe with her sister Anna and husband Omer. Sadly the cafe opening has been delayed due to subsidence issues in Friary House. While the subsidence is being monitored Katia plans to serve a range of hot and cold drinks as well as healthy snacks from a trailer (pictured) next to the house and is in the process of signing a lease agreement with the council.

Katia said: "My husband, sons and I live very close to



Friary Park and know it really well. As well as bringing my experience from running my own cake baking business, I'm looking forward to using my knowledge from working in the food industry into our new venture. "We would really like to renovate the existing rundown cafe and provide high quality healthy food using free range & organic local products for park visitors, dog lovers, children and local residents. We plan to host special events including children's birthday parties, small gatherings and various celebrations. Our menu will feature kosher and halal preferences and are enthusiastic about offering discounted meal deals, coffee cake specials as well as afternoon tea deliveries to our seniors.

"We'd really like to see the cafe as a community hub where local students can exhibit their artwork within Friary House. We can't wait to have you join us at our Cafe Shop soon, where every visit promises a delightful and inspiring experience!"

We look forward to welcoming Katia and her family to the park and enjoying some of their tasty treats!

Help us report pollution

We have been saddened to see recent episodes of pollution like this in Blacketts Brook in the park. If you spot pollution please help us by reporting it immediately to Thames Water on 0800 3169800, the Environment Agency on 0800 807060 and also report on the Thames Pollution tracker on <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/pollution>. Together we can help protect the park's ecosystem and wildlife.



NORTH FINCHLEY TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT – ARTSDEPOT SAVED AMIDST DRIFT AND UNCERTAINTY



arts depot

Our Summer edition reported on the North Finchley regeneration proposals for the demolition of the artsdepot and the bus depot, to be replaced by a high block of flats next to the existing block at 100 Kingsway, and the construction of a replacement for the arts depot on a new site. However these plans have now been abandoned by the developer, Regal London. We understand that this is because TfL have refused to “give up” the existing bus station – so the arts depot should be staying where it is. We think this may be a significant setback for Regal – the loss of the profits they would have hoped to make from the new block of flats may have an impact on their wider plans.

Regal say they now hope to start public consultations on their delayed North Finchley “Masterplan” during November (and have agreed to talk about this to FBWRA at our Member’s Meeting in January (see back page). Until the “Masterplan” is made public the uncertainty continues. Regal have held presentations about their thoughts for the future of Lodge Lane car park (due to be the first site to be developed) which they see as potentially a second focal point in the town centre (the other

being the “triangle” to the north of the artsdepot), and, without being specific, have spoken of this becoming a mixed use development with up to 9 different uses, including a small cinema, bowling alley, public square, cafes/restaurants, housing and parking – quite a lot to put on a relatively small site.

We attended one of the Lodge Lane presentations. Two things that clearly emerged were first there is a general lack of public awareness of the North Finchley regeneration and also of the plan to redevelop the Great North Leisure Park (with the loss of the Hollywood Bowl and Vue multiplex cinema) and secondly great concern at the loss of public car parking that building on the Lodge Lane site will entail – and that is in the context that there is a lack of public information about proposals for other car parks, such as Stanhope Road and Woodhouse Road (which have been identified for development in the Council/ Regal land sale Agreement).

On the Council side of the equation there also appear to be problems – Councillors seem to have “gone to ground”, there are suggestions the Council’s internal co-ordination is poor and the Council is silent on car parking, whilst the North Finchley plans have become entwined with the proposals for redeveloping the Leisure Park (another Regal project) - particularly because the suggestion of a bowling alley and cinema at Lodge Lane are being driven by the Leisure Park, with Regal and the Council hoping they can counter concerns about the loss of the community leisure and cultural facilities at the Leisure Park - so much for the Council’s aspirations to make Barnet a “Borough of Fun” and to become London’s 2027 Borough of Culture ! The Council needs to get its act together- quickly.

DT

FRIERN BARNET SCHOOL STREET PROPOSALS – “We asked, you said, we ignored you”



In July we asked you, FBWRA members, to support our opposition to a Council scheme for a School Street in Friern Barnet, covering part of Bethune Ave as well as Crescent Rd and Hemington Ave (The schools are St Johns CoE Primary and Friern Barnet School), and to respond to the Council's online consultation. Thank you to all those who did – but sadly, the Council has chosen to ignore the results of the consultation and the clear views of those who responded.

Last month the Council's "Traffic Consultation Team" wrote to residents "following that [consultation], it was agreed to proceed with the School Street...". The letter didn't include any further information - no indication of timing, or anything about consultation results. Let's just say that the brevity of the letter was unfortunate. However the consultation results can be found on the Council "Engage Barnet" website, at <https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/school-streets-st-johns-friern-barnet-school> - the Council received 161 responses to the consultation. 31.75% of respondents supported the scheme. 65% of respondents opposing. 3.17% of respondents neither supported nor opposed the scheme. Just 15% of respondents thought the scheme would improve safety. 7% thought it would improve air quality. 9% thought the scheme would reduce traffic. 38% were concerned it would push traffic elsewhere (an issue the Council didn't look at in devising the scheme). 10% of respondents didn't give reasons for their opinions.

The Council's consultation documents gave the main aims of the proposals as being "to create a safer environment for pupils to walk and cycle to school and to deal with the high traffic volumes around schools at certain times of the day" and improving air quality around the schools. Clearly, whatever Council bureaucrats and Councillors may think, the public are unconvinced - 85% responding didn't think the scheme would improve safety, 93% didn't think it would improve air qualityyet, with those pretty damning figures the Council has still decided to go ahead with the scheme - but, perhaps even worse, it has chosen not to give any explanation for that outcome. That is an echo of the attitude exemplified by what the late Douglas Jay (a Labour Party politician) wrote: "the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what good is for people than the people know themselves." The decision to proceed stands in stark contrast with the outcome in another consultation, for Goldbeaters Infant and Junior School and The Annunciation Catholic Infant School, in Edgware – there were just 43 responses to that consultation - 34.88% in support, 55.81% opposed, 9.3% neither supported nor opposed. The Council decided not to proceed with that scheme. We have asked the Council for an explanation of the different outcomes.

"Engage Barnet" is the Council's consultation website. It uses the slogan "We asked, you said, we did". In this case it is clearly inaccurate, it should be "We asked, you said, we ignored you".

DT

REVEALED - MEMBERSHIP OF GROUP THE COUNCIL WANTED TO KEEP SECRET



Some Council activities are understandably hidden from public gaze- for example the press and public are excluded from Council meetings dealing with sensitive commercial issues, but these should be the exception, so earlier this year, when we came across a Council advisory body with a “secret” membership we decided to investigate, on the principle that, in public affairs, daylight is generally better than darkness and fog.

The object of our interest was the Council’s “Culture Strategy External Steering Group”, involved in formulating the Council’s Culture Strategy and a bid for external funding as well as in funding arrangements.

We wanted to find out more about this Group. At the suggestion of a Council officer we made a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for information about it. The results were surprising although some minutes and other information about the recruitment process was provided, the Council refused to provide details of the 16 members of the group, or their qualifications. They told us there were no proposals to publicise the Group’s membership. This refusal was surprising because the guidance from the Information Commissioner (the “regulator” for FOI matters) refers to a “general requirement for transparency in public life” which creates a legitimate interest in the

information being made available. This is particularly the case where, as here, there is an involvement with spending decisions.

We made a formal request to the Council to review their decision- and were successful, at least in part. The Council asked the members of the Group to agree to their names being released. 12 of the 16 agreed and their names are now on the Council website.

So, what of the members of this mysterious Group? Well, we think that using the internet we have identified 8 of the 12 people whose names the Council released. They include an Associate Professor in the school of Arts and Creative Industries at Middlesex University, a Trustee of Barnet Borough Arts Council, a theatre director, a senior member of the artsdepot, a cinema director and a community engagement specialist at a leading museum. Unfortunately in reviewing their initial decision the Council “sidestepped” the issues and failed to provide a proper analysis to justify that the initial refusal to disclose was correct. When responding with the result of the review they told us that the Council department wanted the Group to be able to maintain its independence from attempts at lobbying – but that rather smacks of “after the event justification”, as it wasn’t mentioned in the initial refusal. Our position on all this is that a person accepting a public appointment should generally have a reasonable expectation that they will be subject to some public scrutiny of their performance of that role. Perhaps the Council acted to “sidestep” in order to avoid creating a precedent?

At the time of writing we are waiting for the Council to tell us if they have other “secret groups” within certain areas of their structure.

DT

FRIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN.....



Have you ever watched a play at the Incognito Theatre Club in Holly Park Road, N11? You may be forgiven if you do not even know of its existence as the theatre is not instantly recognisable from the street. However, if you have never sought it out, you are certainly missing out on viewing some of the best amateur dramatic productions in the country.

In the 1930's Holly Park School was a secondary school and a teacher named Owen Berry set up a drama society for interested pupils. They performed locally and with great enjoyment but this ceased when WW2 began.

After peace was declared, the acting began again but with one big difference. Between the school playground and also hidden by the doctors surgery in Holly Park Road was an old, disused, two storied building with no running water or toilet facilities, known locally as The Factory. The thespian's decided to turn it into a theatre for their own productions. It was a vast project but one that has been worked on by different incarnations of group members over the years until there now exists a 63 seater theatre with dressing rooms, a lighting and sound box, toilets, running water, a foyer, a bar, many storage areas and a costume, furniture and props department that is the envy of all other local groups.

This shambolic edifice had begun life at the turn of the 19/20th centuries as a factory creating and bottling aerated water. This did not last for too long as the owner died fairly young. The ownership was taken eventually over by Friern Barnet Urban District

Council as the council's array of large, petrol driven mowers were stored there during the war in the part where the horses, ponies and carts of the aerated water company had once stood. It was a large, impacted, earthen area that the youngsters managed to turn into their auditorium using seating from a bombed out theatre to entice their audience into their productions.

It worked. The group was initially named, "Incognito", with no actors being named beside the part they were playing in a production. Presumably, the need to be known by name took over from the idea of anonymity as people's ego's grew. How else would we know that David Jason, Christopher Timothy and James Grout are among the club's alumni? David is still a patron of the club and acted as, "Incog", for ten years before fame, quite rightly, called him.

The current theatre group members produce 6 plays each year, showcasing a mixture of old, popular and modern plays. From Shakespeare to Terence Rattigan to Conor McPherson, the Incognito Theatre Group will present them all. Members act (brilliantly at times), design and build the most wonderful sets, create amazing costumes, produce very effective sound effects, learn to manage an incredible lighting system all under the aegis of a stage manager and, most importantly of all, a director. Creating any show often requires more back stage staff than actors and this must also include the front of house members who ensure that seats are booked, the bar is open, drinks are served, the health and safety legislation is adhered to, the premises are clean.....the list is endless.

From 19th-25th November, 'A Christmas Carol' will run and then in January, a fairly new play entitled 'The Weir'. Look the group up online at Incognito Theatre Group

Book online or by phone on 07783 418638.....

You may be sure of a good welcome and, hopefully, you will also enjoy the play.

KS

PLANNING NEWS

CARE HOME APPLICATION 1- 3 OAKLEIGH PARK SOUTH

Together with many others we objected to plans for a 70-bedroom care home in Oakleigh Park South, near Sacred Heart primary school. If it went ahead the proposal would involve demolishing a “locally listed building” – a 19th century villa at 3 OPS (and another such listed building at 5 OPS would be adversely affected). Locally listed buildings are meant to be protected from development – the Council’s website states “listed buildings are protected locally by planning policy..... so we will make sure that their special character is protected and enhanced.” Unfortunately, when the developer/its advisers asked the Council for “pre-application advice” about the plans they didn’t mention the existence of the locally listed buildings (one might ask why- perhaps they hadn’t checked the public list of such buildings) and the Council planning officers seemingly didn’t check either –

their written advice about the plans made no mention of the buildings’ status and, as they were unaware of the listings, that advice may have been wrong in its assessment of the acceptability of the plans – so when the developer prepared its planning application it may have done so on the basis of inaccurate advice. A Barnet planning officer not involved with this application told us “Checking constraints of Locally and Statutory Listed Buildings -It is Officers duty to check for any constraints surrounding all application sites and Officers are instructed on every application to check and Officers do not rely on any submission documents to alert them to these assets.” Late in October one of the local Councillors wrote about this application to a member of the informal residents’ group we have been working with – “The application is currently on hold to allow the applicant to respond to the Council’s principle objection, being the loss of and harm to locally listed buildings located within and outside the application site.....” Oh, the irony.

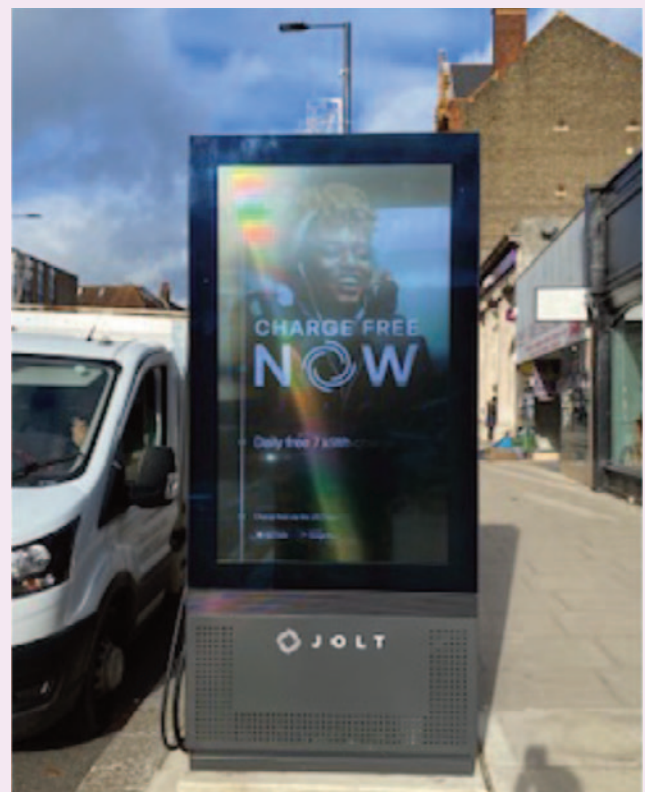
ELECTRICAL VEHICLE CHARGING POINT UNIT WITH DOUBLE-SIDED LCD SCREEN OUTSIDE 780 - 782 HIGH ROAD LONDON N12 9QR

This was an application for an EV charging point with a large advertising screen above and which has recently been installed under an arrangement between the Council and JOLT Charge, part of a project to install 120 such points across the borough.

The installation is next to 778-780 High Road, another “locally listed building”. Again, this wasn’t picked up by planners who approved the application (in fairness, the special features of 778-780 are the brickwork of the upper levels, so being unaware of the local listing may have made no difference to the outcome), nor was it mentioned in the application documents.

These are two instances that we have recently come across in the course of our planning activities, which look at only a very small proportion of the applications handled by the Council. There may well be others. Let’s just say “Improvement required”. We also heard that the Council has been asked to take enforcement action in respect of the installation (which could result in it having to be removed) for breach of planning controls including,

it is claimed that the screens are substantially larger than the sizes the Council approved. Oh dear!
DT



PLEASE RECYCLE THIS NEWSLETTER

Think about giving it to a friend or neighbour before putting it in the bin.

If they like what they see they might become a Member too!

Membership is £5 a year per household. Membership Forms can be downloaded from our website www.fbwra.org.

If that is too complicated, an email to fbwra@btinternet.com asking to join and giving a name and address will do the trick.

CHAOS IN FRIERN BARNET ROAD

The developers of a new block of flats in Friern Barnet Road caused traffic chaos when their contractor installed a tower crane one weekday last month. Perhaps the work couldn't be done overnight – or would that be more expensive? HG



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2024

This is due on the 2nd January 2024 - **please don't pay early!**

A renewal letter will be sent only to those who have not paid by Standing Order.

Paying electronically if at all possible and quoting your membership number (which will be on the renewal reminder) would help us very much.

Please consider setting the payment up as an annual one for the 2nd January each year.

It also simplifies our administration if you could pay promptly.

2024 DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 23rd January | Members Meeting in St Mary Magdalen's Church Hall, Athenaeum Road N20
Regal London have agreed to present their plans for the regeneration of North Finchley Town Centre |
| 18th April | Annual General meeting in St John's Church Hall, Friern Barnet Road, N11 |
| 18th August | Summer Splash in St Mary Magdalen's Church Hall, N20 |

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
 - The Finchley Society
 - Friends of Friary Park
 - The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society
 - The London Green Belt Council
 - Love Whetstone
 - Open Spaces Society