

Letters to The Editor

Checks and Balances

Dear Editor

Re: Proposed Waitrose Store in East Finchley

The lack of balanced discussion of this proposed development probably stems from the wording of the invitation to the public meeting, which was phrased so as to discourage the attendance of most Waitrose supporters.

I know many people who, given the necessary safeguards concerning size of store and traffic arrangements, would positively welcome a Waitrose in East Finchley. It would be an instrument of regeneration and a service to the broader community, particularly the car-less. In fact, the traffic would probably be little changed, as, even if some shoppers do come from elsewhere, many residents would no longer drive north to find satisfactory supermarkets. Please also consider that, as many people would drop in to shop on the way home from the underground station, some car journeys might be eliminated completely.

The issue of moving the library is surely a red herring, providing emotive reasons for opposing the supermarket. It really is not that far from the old site to the proposed new one: many walk that distance every day to reach the underground station and would follow the same route to the proposed new library. Public libraries do not exist solely to service schools' needs, though if they did then a larger library should surely be welcomed. The needs of disabled and older residents are at least as valid as those of schoolchildren: if there is no possibility of providing disabled access to all parts of the existing premises then the library should, in any case, move to a building offering adequate facilities.

Yours sincerely

Valerie Teague
Leopold Road, N2.

Regeneration?

Copy of letter sent to Mr Leo Boland, Barnet Council's Chief Executive

Dear Mr Boland

Re: Proposed Waitrose Development in East Finchley

I take great exception to your letter of 14 January 2003 to Dr Vis.

You talk about "regeneration benefits of such a development to East Finchley". What possible benefits could such a development bring if it results in the closing down of existing successful small businesses, losing the village atmosphere of the shopping area and creating total traffic chaos and gridlock. We have a very good library in close proximity to two schools and which, with careful adaptation, could meet all disabled needs.

If regeneration is what you are seeking for the Park House site, you would be far better served in building low rise affordable flats, much needed for nurses, teachers and other low paid individuals who would welcome good access to public transport. This would also bring more customers for the existing businesses.

I feel very strongly that this Council is totally misdirected in its even considering such a development in this area. What it does 'smack' of is corruption and it would be a terrible indictment of local government if that were the case.

Your comments would be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Natalie Black
Maya Road, N2

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Smartening up

Dear Editor

I am in favour of the proposed building of a Waitrose supermarket. It will provide much needed jobs for East Finchley with a high-quality employer and will help smarten up what is, with some exceptions, a rather shabby High Road. Residents will be able to shop in a convenient spot right opposite the tube and will not have to drive out of the area to Muswell Hill, Finchley Central or Brent Cross to get their shopping. As for the concerns about existing businesses such as greengrocers and the fishmongers, I believe they will survive because, unlike Waitrose, they have a loyal clientele, a very competitive pricing structure and are extremely high quality.

For those who say that Waitrose will destroy community life, I do not think that two large bookmakers, takeaway food chains, hire shops and stores where goods are thrown into the front window or have dilapidated signage constitute a 'community village feel' and are not going to tempt people into shopping locally.

Consulting the community

With regard to the new library proposal, I do think the plans to incorporate it into the Waitrose supermarket need to be considered carefully. The existing library is a beautiful building in an ideal location as it's next to a school and its playing field. I do think there should be a way to provide disabled library users with the facilities they require without demolishing the existing building. I do not think Waitrose would have objection to revamping the existing library as it would cost them much less than building a new one.

It's only by Barnet Council, in consultation with the community, taking a more pro-active approach with regard to the planning of the High Street that it can be transformed into a more lively, attractive area and not an unattractive, drive-through.

Deirdre Coughlan
Trinity Road, N2.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.

Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



Planning Gain

By Ian Cormack

Recent goings-on in East Finchley have brought the thorny problem of 'Planning Gain' to the fore. Barnet Council is apparently negotiating with the potential developers of the Park House and adjoining land site for the "public good" – for things such as better library facilities, state of the art toilets and smoother, more scenic walkways, and the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood and possibly other groups have been encouraged to do likewise.

But isn't negotiating with the developers for a sweetener in return for their getting an increase in land value tackling the problem the wrong way round? This haphazard procedure with whatever 'wish list' is available at the time is not the way to deal with a very precious natural resource in our crowded country.

A common resource

If we "the people" are somehow also entitled to get benefit from the land value, should we not also be tapping in to any land where the value is being appropriated into private hands, not just where there is a change? After all, land is distinct from buildings and manufactured goods in that it is not man-made. It is a common resource to which we should all have an equal claim and this can be achieved by people paying rent for the land they use into a pot for us all to share.

This is not a new form of taxation but an alternative source of revenue, ethically underpinned by seeking to recover wealth created by the community to fund the expenses of the community. The supermarket scheme would not work in the Outer Hebrides but would work in East Finchley, due to the surrounding population increasing the number of potential customers and this is what creates the land value. Traditional taxes largely ignore this publicly created wealth, allowing it to be taken by diverse private interests.

So let us not ride on developers' backs but let developments be judged solely on their merits, pure and simple, with the public interest being catered for by a more rational raising of public revenue.

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