



Rama Talwar takes a well earned rest. Photo by John Dearing

Deafening Silence on Finchley Children's Music

By Sophie Leighton

The Finchley Children's Music Group, which has been in existence for 45 years and has over 160 children on its register, is now facing the bleak prospect of winding up its operations early next year if the proposed closure of the Wilmot Centre goes ahead. The existing arrangements in the Wilmot Centre and Holy Trinity school uniquely accommodate the specific rehearsal needs of their three choirs and all the efforts they have made so far suggest that there are unlikely to be any alternative affordable venues in reach of children in the borough. This charity receives no council grant and their use of the Wilmot Centre contributes at least £3,000 per annum to its upkeep.

Complaint

On 29 September, FCMG made a formal complaint to Barnet Council, stating that there had been no formal notification of the closure proposal, which they learned about only by chance. They had then been

asked by the Council simply to consult the local press for news. Since council leader Victor Lyon's announcement at the Forum meeting of a temporary stay of execution for the Wilmot Centre and a review by councillor Peter Davies, no consultation has taken place.

Sham?

Alison Moore, councillor for East Finchley ward and deputy leader of the Labour group, commented, "It's now clear that they had already decided to close the Centre regardless. Temporarily halting that plan and promising more consultation was a sham. It was all about preventing the youth and community groups speaking in opposition at the council meeting and keeping the issue out of the press when Ofsted were re-inspecting the Tory council's failing youth service. There has been no further

consultation with any of the groups. Cllr Davies will just bring the issue back to Cabinet when he thinks all the fuss has died down."

Stupidity?

Cllr. Monroe Palmer, leader of the Liberal Democrat group, commented, "I regard it as crass stupidity to close a youth centre without serious consideration of what it is used for. The Finchley Children's Music Group is clearly an asset to the Borough and one of which we should, as a borough, be proud."

FCMG are currently preparing for a production of a new children's opera *The Snow Queen*, to be performed in the new Arts Depot in Winter 2004, and are working on a CD in conjunction with another major charity. If the Centre is lost, these are just two of many youth projects and activities that will go to the wall.

Check This Out

By Diana Cormack

Customers at Budgens on the High Road have been admiring the recent refurbishment, where modern shelving and checkout desks have helped to create a more spacious new look. But sadly one of its greatest attractions will no longer be seen about the store for, at the end of November, Rama Talwar is retiring.

Noregular customer will need to ask, "Who?" for Rama is well known amongst the shoppers of East Finchley for her ready smile and her friendly chat at the checkout. It was on 20 September 1980 that Rama, who lives in New Barnet, began working at the supermarket. Over the years she has seen many changes; she has watched children grow up

and people move on and now it is her turn.

The first thing Rama plans to do is to take a long holiday in India with her husband to visit family and friends. On her return she hopes to learn how to use a computer, with the promise of being given one by her son if she succeeds. Rama, who also has a daughter and a grandson,

may take up yoga too, but before she does anything she intends to have a good rest.

Though she will not miss the hard work at the till over the festive season, Rama will miss the many friends she has made in East Finchley. Being such a well-loved local character, Rama can be sure that her customers will miss her too.

Ann Owens Centre Fights Back

By Daphne Chamberlain

When Henry Cooper visited the Ann Owens Centre advocating flu jabs, his hosts were preparing to ward off a knockout blow. If Barnet Council carry out a plan to cut their grant to Age Concern by £100,000, the Centre would be seriously affected.

Assistant Manager Enid Branchdale told *THE ARCHER*, "The Trustees for Age Concern Barnet have appealed against the proposal, but it seems unlikely that there won't be cuts. We are proud of this Centre. We've worked hard to raise funds for it, and we don't know what is going to happen."

The Centre in Oak Lane was purpose-built in 1991 as a meeting-place for Finchley's senior citizens. Users who can't make their own way there are bussed in. The building, which has disabled access, is open every weekday from 9.30am to 4pm, with a cooked lunch for members every day except Wednesday.

Hard hit

Well-established activities include classes in craft, needlework and art, dancing, exercises for all abilities, and Bingo. *THE ARCHER* has featured several of these sessions and the people who run them—often themselves users of the Centre.

Some senior citizens simply chat or play cards, but they can enjoy talks, entertainments, outings and holidays. There are frequent visits from a hairdresser, a chiropodist and a pensions advisor, and people with specific problems can be put in touch with help agencies. The Centre also

houses the Age Concern Barnet Handy Person Scheme, Ageing-Well and Trans-Age Action, which have separate funding.

Age Concern Barnet has other centres in Friern Barnet and Hendon, which are also facing an uncertain future.

Ann Owens, who died in 1993, was the Organising Secretary of what was then Finchley Age Concern, which grew out of the Finchley Old Peoples' Welfare Committee. The Centre was her idea, and she helped raise the money to build it.

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