



Highlighting the High Road

By Diana Cormack

The recent report dismissing an appeal made by the Tesco/Esso Alliance to redevelop the Esso filling station between Leopold Road and Church Lane contained some interesting comments. It maintained that the proposals did not fit in with present Government policy that new retail investment should be used to sustain and develop existing centres. It also noted that the newly built block of retirement homes between Hertford and Bedford Roads effectively isolates the northern section of High Road shops from the rest of the "town centre", whose viability is considered to be "fairly fragile". Part of the reason for this was a relatively poor representation by national multiples and quite a high proportion of shops trading in items of relatively narrow and specialist consumer appeal, "such as antiques and the hire of fancy dress."

In fact Martin Henham Antiques is our only antique shop and for more than fifteen years Culture Vultures has been widely known for providing fancy dress requirements. Admittedly businesses have come and gone but, at present, none of the properties in the parade of shops opposite East Finchley Methodist Church is empty. Whilst some reflect modern trends, like the Laser Hair Removal salon, the Healthy Glow Tanning Specialists and the popular 202 hairdressers, others provide necessities. There is HR Dry Cleaners, the HSS Hire Shop and Kents food and wine shop, which is open all hours for the convenience of its customers. Along with the shops down Church Lane and Long Lane, Kents would have been badly hit by the development of the petrol station. Businesses adjacent to the site - Motts Goodwin Insurance, Adtreck Technology and the Top Pizza take-away trade - would probably have felt little effect.

So local traders live to fight another day, but the spotlight is certainly not off their area. Anyone passing along that part of the High Road cannot fail to notice a business that is attracting more and more customers. The Meze Bar Restaurant, with its open frontage and pavement tables, has brought a holiday atmosphere to that part of East Finchley. Alan Dobrin of Alan's Records (see July's ARCHER) is delighted with his next-door neighbour's success.

"Maybe it won't bring me many more customers, but it has really opened up this end of the High Road," he said, "and that's got to be a good thing."



Diners enjoy the High Road's atmosphere. Photo by Sue Holliday

High Street Survivor Speaks Out

By Daphne Chamberlain

A Finchley man has brought the case of local traders to the Finchley Society. At a recent meeting, Lawrie Chivers of A1 Motors asked for the Society's support against the growing domination of supermarkets, hypermarkets and multiples.

Lawrie, an electrical engineer who has spent all his life (if you don't count the first six weeks) in East Finchley, described his biggest claim to fame as "surviving 35 years in a very hostile retail environment". He and his brother, Roger, were founder members of A1 Motors, an organisation of independent retailers, who, through co-operating in buying and in joint publicity, keep their prices low - often undercutting multiples, discounts notwithstanding.

Even so, over the last 10 years their turnover has halved. The business rate has gone up by 29% in five years, inflation by 11%, parking permits by 12%, wheelie bins by 12½%, and insurance by 65%. Out of every £100 through the till, 80% goes on overheads, leaving just 20% for everything else. Theirs is a typical High Street experience.

Lawrie told the Society that the main reason was the proliferation of supermarkets and hypermarkets. While not against supermarkets and multiples in principle, he said that there were too many retail outlets in this country.

"The French invented hypermarkets, but they still nurture local shops and sustain a thriving local economy. If only we could do the same!"

He asked whether a big



Lawrie Chivers photo by Erini Rodis

multiple concern would cook meals, change bulbs or call ambulances for elderly neighbours, all of which have happened in our High Road. Would its staff necessarily have enough knowledge to give customers worthwhile assistance? Social benefits aside, he reminded his audience that local businesses use local banks, local builders, local Post Offices and local window-cleaners.

In turn, the Council should be more aware of local needs. Barnet Council could help more, instead of believing that big business is beautiful. The Finchley Society, Lawrie concluded, is very well respected, with strong lobbying power. If its members agreed with him, he urged them to use their power to influence Council policy.

FORUM REPORT

By Daphne Chamberlain

The July Finchley Forum was held at the Green Man Centre and covered the following topics:

Two-Way at the Tally Ho?

It seems now that Kingsway will become two-way and Ballards Lane will not become pedestrianised. Councillor Kathy McGuirk said that not even Ward Councillors had been consulted.

Parking Killing Trade

Another complaint about lack of consultation came from North Finchley traders, who predicted that parking restrictions would turn the area into a ghost town. "Who is going to park at North Finchley when they can whizz up to Brent Cross for nothing?" One small garage owner calculated that the scheme was costing him £10,000 a year.

The Highways Department replied that local businesses had been sent consultation forms, but very few had returned them. Highways maintained that 450 business bays seemed adequate, but when traders said that people couldn't trek round looking for them, they promised to carry out another survey at a different time of day. A complaint that there were not enough disabled drivers' bays convenient for workplaces was registered.

The Chair, Councillor Leslie Sussman said that he would ask for the six-month review period to be brought forward.

Bow Lane Playing Field

A member of the public reported a rumour that it would remain as a playing field for 10 years, and asked why this was not in the public arena. Councillor Sussman said he would find out.

Glebe Lands Pond

This is allegedly being fished extensively, upsetting the balance of wildlife and encouraging car parking on the grass. The issues of ownership and what can be done were deferred.

Coppetts Close Construction Site

This was said to be excessively noisy, with workers also operating outside agreed hours. The Environmental Health Department has put in a capital bid for acoustic fencing, and residents were advised to write to Barnet Customer Care.

The next Forum will be at 6.30pm on Wednesday 1 October, at Avenue House, East End Road, Finchley, N3.

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