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Hospital Site Plans Approved

In a blow to local residents and protestors, Barnet Council has approved plans to build two large blocks of flats and a college building on the site of the National Neurological Hospital behind East Finchley Station.

Barnet Planning and Environment Committee approved the latest proposal from Octagon Developments at a packed meeting at Hendon Town Hall on 17 March. The old Neurological Hospital will be demolished and three blocks, one for Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute and the other two providing housing for 600 people, will be built. East Finchley's councillor Alison Moore was one of those in favour; three councillors opposed it.

Protesting Voices

A presentation was given to the meeting about the amended plan. Then four local residents spoke, some representing organised residents' groups

and all strongly opposed to the development.

Mr. Dickinson revealed that one of Barnet's own conservation officers believed that the integrity of the Conservation area would be damaged by the development and Mr Stein claimed that travel patterns, traffic and parking had been inadequately analysed in the Buchanan Traffic Assessment carried out for Octagon and stressed the need for a truly independent survey.

Mr. Joseph raised questions about the absence of affordable housing in the development and told the Committee, "It will not reflect well on your administration".

Councillors' Concerns

In response to committee members' questions, planning officers gave assurances about trees and acoustic screening. Critical questioning drew an admission of 'irregularities' in the Buchanan Traffic Assessment. One councillor was concerned about the already dangerous junction of The Bishop's Avenue with the A1000 but was told there are "few pedestrian accidents at present" and that the junction "would not behave very differently".

Finally the councillors voted to agree with "the overall balanced conclusion that the scheme is acceptable". Objectors now have to decide on their next course of action.



A thing of the past? Some cycle lanes might be removed under Barnet Council's transport policy. Photo by Tony Roberts

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Collision Course

Barnet Council looks set to be on a collision course with Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, over the council's roads policy. Mr Livingstone, who has described the council's policy as being "recklessly anti-public transport, anti-pedestrian and anti-cycling", is threatening to block hundreds of thousands of pounds from Barnet's annual £5 million grant from Transport for London.

Brian Coleman, the councillor responsible for transport policy, says that his aim is to "get traffic moving on the

borough's principle roads and then no one rat-runs down side streets. "This approach has led to the removal of speed humps

and the ending of some bus and cycle lanes. Mr Livingstone, whose policy has been to promote public transport, feels that Barnet is becoming a "laboratory experiment for some ill thought-out policies", but Mr Coleman is unrepentant, commenting that TfL "stands for Taliban for London" and that neither TfL nor Mr Livingstone really understand "what happens in the suburbs".

According to a TfL spokesperson, payments for some road schemes were being withheld while it makes sure that the schemes "accord with the Mayor's transport strategy and TfL funding criteria. For example, Barnet has spent our money reconstructing speed tables. We need to check that they haven't, in fact, been removed."

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