



East Finchley GPs Not Accepting New Patients

By John Dearing

A number of people who recently moved into East Finchley have told *THE ARCHER* that they had no success when they tried to register with a GP in N2. Barnet Primary Care Trust (PCT) told one person to obtain a letters from three local GPs each stating that they are not taking new patients. Subsequently, they were allocated to a GP in N3, to whom they would have to drive.

We contacted the PCT for an explanation and for confirmation that GP lists in N2 are closed. They said that they are responsible for all patients of Barnet GPs "irrespective of where they reside". In other words, the PCT does not regard local provision of GP services as an issue. They did, however, admit that recruitment of GP staff is a local problem, and blamed "difficulty in expanding buildings". They said that East Finchley had recently got two more GPs. They did not admit that GP lists in East Finchley are full; but since they require people to prove they cannot register, it could be that they do not actually know!

The PCT Estates Strategy shows that Primary Care buildings in Barnet are in a parlous state, and in many areas such as N2 there is little scope for improvement or expansion. They believe that this is the root cause of the problem with GP lists.

More centralisation

The PCT plan is to make significant investment in their estate over the next five years, focusing in particular on community hospitals and health clinics in areas identified as problematic (but not N2). The strategy does take into account demographic health issues such as those of ethnic minorities and different age groups, and states that it follows the overall NHS estates guidelines but also says that it has not been linked

with Barnet Council's Unitary Development Plan.

There does not seem to be much promotion of local GP-run practices, and increasing centralisation of provision is probable in the future. Nor is it likely that Barnet Council would do anything to change this, as it would involve shifting their planning emphasis away

from yet more residential development to provision of social facilities.

Nowhere is there any evidence of consultation – do people want to have to drive several miles, or wait in the rain for a bus in order to attend a GP's surgery? Surely NHS agencies should be promoting healthy practices, such as walking?



Post haste: Finchley's Post Office. Photo by Erini Rodis

Hasty Post Closure

By Erini Rodis

Finchley Central residents are protesting the imminent closure of their local Post Office on Ballards Lane.

Economics are blamed and an eight-week public consultation was announced in mid January. Unless they hear from enough members of the public that they want to keep it open,

it'll be closed in April.

Automated payment of pensions and benefits into bank accounts has allowed the post office to reduce some over-the-counter services. However N3 customers are resenting the prospect of having to travel to East or North Finchley branches simply to send a parcel or a Special / Recorded Delivery item. Communities may be forced to mingle but this is also likely to make queues longer.

People are asked to write to Finchley and Golders Green, Labour MP Dr Rudi Vis at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA by the end of February, with their views.

Ann Owens Centre – Future Uncertain

By Daphne Chamberlain

With Barnet in deep financial trouble, a drastic prioritising of funding has begun. A full Council meeting on Tuesday 2 March will consider a recommendation to cut the grant to Age Concern by £150,000. In the present climate, any reduction to this figure is extremely unlikely.

Mark Robinson of Age Concern told *THE ARCHER* that his trustees would be talking to Barnet in the intervening period. He said, "The trustees have got to look at how we can cope."

As reported last year, the Ann Owens Centre building is used by other Age Concern projects as well as by the day centre. It is not expected that the building itself will close,

but reductions in funding point to loss of staff.

Nobody Knows

Morale at the Centre is obviously low. As one 'regular' told *THE ARCHER*, "This used to be such a lovely, happy place. Now the atmosphere is different. Nobody knows what's going on."

A Council spokesperson said, "It's up to Age Concern how they will prioritise."

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