



Top that? Photo by Tony Roberts

Odeon development refusal

According to the Lib Dems, Haringey's planning committee has refused a controversial application to build an additional storey on the flats forming part of the Odeon cinema building in Muswell Hill.

The additional level, including a bridge over the car park entrance with flats above, would have spoiled the appearance of this local landmark, with its classic silhouette, and put more pressure on parking and social infrastructure.

Cllr Gail Engert has pledged to monitor closely any future planning application for the site.

Local Agenda for the Year Ahead

Everyone is invited to a public meeting to discuss East Finchley's environmental issues at 7.00pm on Tuesday 25 May at the Green Man Community Centre.

Hosted by Local Agenda 21, the main speaker will be Stuart Gadsden, Barnet's Waste and Sustainability Officer for East Finchley. The meeting will see the launch of the first recycling guide for East Finchley, as well as the start of a recycling scheme

for Strawberry Vale. There will also be tree planting at Strawberry Vale earlier in the day.

It's your future

The meeting will double as the annual general meeting for LA21 – the first since the council withdrew from the LA21 partnerships in March. And there will be refreshments and plenty of time to meet others concerned about East Finchley's future.

Turn up on the day or phone 020 8883 4916 for details.

Volunteers' Group closes

By Ann Bronkhorst

After 29 years the end has come for Barnet Volunteer Bureau. Among the reasons for its closure on 31 March were changes to its sources of funding. Gail Scott-Spicer, Barnet's Communications Director, explained that funding for BVB's transport scheme from the Community Care Service was withdrawn last December but there had been no plans to discontinue their annual revenue grant. The loss of the funding for transport, however, seems to have precipitated BVB's decision to close.

We produced actions

At a farewell gathering on 24 March at Avenue House there were reminiscences and some regrets. Bill Tyler, Chair of the Finchley Society, said that a valuable service was being lost to the borough.

Rose Hambury, Chair of the Management Committee, acknowledged that the annual revenue grant was never adequate while Joy Wowrek felt that the Bureau had always been run inexpensively, as a charity. Joy, who worked at BVB for 16 years, said, "We produced actions, not loads of paper." The Bureau ran citizenship and community service schemes with second-

ary schools and administered a leisure coaches scheme. BVB ran a database for the Home Office and checked information on volunteers for local organisations. Above all, Joy felt the Bureau had always recognised the needs as well as the strengths of volunteers.

The best outcome?

The importance of the volunteers themselves is echoed by Julie Hawkins, who describes them as "the lifeblood of the voluntary sector". As Chief Executive of Barnet Voluntary Service Council, a charity with a membership of over 270 groups in Barnet, she is aware of the gap created by the demise of the Bureau. She intends to consult all the groups who come under the BVSC umbrella to find out what sort of service the voluntary sector now needs. She stresses the importance of opportunities for volunteering, proper support for volunteers themselves and maintenance of public confidence. At present it seems likely that BVSC will take on some of the work previously done by the Bureau, a possibility described by Councillor Mike Freer as "the best outcome".

On the buses

Here are two new ways to influence your local transport:

Bus group goes into action

The local campaign to improve the 263 and 143 services starts in earnest this month, with support from Haringey West Bus Watch. All adult members of the community are welcome - age and/or disability will not be an impediment. Note that this is not intended to be a talking shop; volunteers will be actively involved. Anyone interested should contact Hazel Burnett on 020 8444 6824 or at hazel.burnett@freeuk.com.

Your chance to comment on bus design

A GLA bus forum is currently considering varied aspects of bus design. The East Finchley Bus Group will pass on comments and suggestions to them. Please contact Hazel Burnett on 020 8444 6824 or at hazel.burnett@freeuk.com.

Victim and witness support team launched

On Monday 26 April 2004 as part of the *Justice for London* project, Barnet police are launching their witness and victim support team. This dedicated team of staff will provide a single point of contact for all victims and witnesses whose cases are awaiting trial.

Enhanced victim and witness care is one of the ways that the government are seeking to restore public confidence in the criminal justice system.

The unit is helping to ensure that witnesses know what is happening in their particular cases. They will be working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support Service and witness services. Victim support is a crucial element. This unit will ensure regular contact from the police.

Building confidence

Because witnesses have often had difficulty chasing down individual officers for information, some have become

frustrated, or lost faith in the judicial process and chosen not to attend court. The Victim and Witness Support Unit will identify vulnerable witnesses and ensure by regular contact that they do attend court.

Victim and Witness Support Unit officers offer victims and witnesses a personal point of contact; once someone is charged, the victims and witnesses are allocated a Victim/Witness Support Officer. Situations are assessed to suit the individual's needs. Allowing witnesses to give testimony from behind a screen or via a video link can make the difference between them deciding to testify or not and judges are

becoming more willing to use these measures.

Chief Inspector Lucy D'Orsi, the officer in charge of the unit at Barnet said, "The work of our unit will be vital in ensuring that victims and witnesses in cases get all the support they need. It will ensure that witnesses feel more confident attending court, which will assist in securing a successful prosecution. The idea of attending court and testifying against people who may be dangerous criminals can be a daunting one. Victim and witness support officers will provide an important point of contact to explain the situation and allay witnesses' fears."

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