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Local News Is Our Aim

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A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.



The Big Fun walkers set off on the route in Cherry Tree Wood. Photo by John Lawrence

Big Fun Walk

By Julia Lawrence

It started with a casual suggestion at a committee meeting a decade ago, and has sent thousands of people on an annual pilgrimage across London, from East Finchley to Westminster to raise money for the North London Hospice.

And on Sunday 20 March, the North West Support Group's Big Fun Walk was still growing in popularity as more than 1,000 people gathered for the event's 10th anniversary.

A surge of last-minute entrants, spurred on by the promise of good weather, sent the number of walkers soaring. Committee organisers are predicting the exact number will easily beat last year, when 900 braved freezing drizzle for the seven and a half mile hike, raising £112,000.

Following the same route as last year, walkers gathered at East Finchley tube station at 9.30am. A throng of people, dogs, pushchairs and at least one clown, held traffic on East Finchley High Road to a standstill as they filed across into Cherry Tree Woods for the first leg of the walk.

The route then took them through Highgate woods to Belsize Park, and through Regents Park into Baker Street, Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner, finishing at Westminster Abbey. At casual pace, with a couple of breaks, it took four hours to complete.

Organisers of the event worked since August to make sure all went smoothly. Ten marshals were positioned along the route, directing walkers through underpasses and park gates, and a whole team of volunteers handed out sandwiches, biscuits and bottles of water at pit-stops along the way.

A steel band and welcome committee was waiting at the end to hand out medals to the children and cups of tea and cakes to the walkers.

Now the real hard work begins – collecting all the sponsorship money.

263 is “problem route”

By Daphne Chamberlain

London Transport Users Committee has identified the 263 as a problem route - particularly the “solo stretch” between East and North Finchley, where there are no alternative buses. The finding comes in a report based on travel diaries kept by 23 members of the public, and random journeys by LTUC members.

The report questions Barnet's traffic policy, saying that if it continues “the bus operator may find it increasingly difficult even to maintain the current level of reliability”.

The recorded average waiting time for a 263 was twice as long as it should be. In addition, in just over one in 10 journeys surveyed, the passengers had to stand for whole or part of the ride. This was mainly on the solo stretch and following a gap in service. The passengers most affected were older people limited to the lower deck, which was criticised for lack of capacity.

On the positive side, the 263 scored higher than other buses surveyed for cleanliness and driver courtesy.

The report criticised Barnet for favouring general road traffic above public transport users, citing little enforcement

of parking controls around bus stops as one example. It also blamed the bottleneck at Barnet General Hospital for knock-on delays, which it identified as most apparent between North and East Finchley because there is no alternative service.

LTUC have recommended that London Buses put in additional monitoring points, particularly at East Finchley, and also that Transport for London give priority to buses where there are road works.

London Transport Users Committee is the official watchdog for transport users in and around London. Copies of this report can be obtained by contacting tel.020 7505 9000, fax 020 7505 9003 or e-mail publications@ltuc.org.uk.

See page 3 for responses from Barnet and East Finchley Bus Watch.

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