



Letters

**We can't do without plastic bags**

Dear Editor,

The campaign against plastic bags shows a superficial and simplistic attitude on the part of environmentalists. It is no accident that plastic bags have been used in their millions since they were invented. Apart from being cheap to produce, they are watertight, hygienic, weigh nothing and have a multitude of uses.

In fact, large numbers of plastic bags are already recycled by being re-used, as rubbish containers, bin liners, sandwich bags, etc, and can be taken backwards and forwards for shopping instead of acquiring new bags on every trip.

One fact ignored by the advocates of the big 'bag for life' is that there are many older and weaker people who simply cannot lift or carry heavy bags. One cloth bag is no substitute for several smaller plastic bags, which will not wreck the shopping if something spills, leaks or gets squashed.

You can't line a dustbin with paper or cotton. The only beneficiaries would be rats, maggots and bin-cleaning companies. A ban on plastic shopping bags would lead to an increase in sales of rolls of plastic bin liners and food storage bags for fridge and freezer. It would not obviate the need for plastic.

The practical solution is surely a campaign for people to take their plastic bags back to the shops to use again. This could be combined with the existing campaign for plastic bags to be made ultimately (after reasonable use) biodegradable.

Yours faithfully,  
Valerie Jablon,  
Address supplied.

**Break the bag habit**

Dear Editor

Shopkeepers have as much responsibility as their customers for reducing the number of plastic bags. For years I have carried my own shopping bag but, even when I put this on the counter, unless I say "I've got a bag" my purchase is put into a plastic bag before I can prevent it.

Charging for bags is of course the best solution. This is probably a step too far at the moment, but instead of being given a bag customers should be asked, "Do you need a bag?" The more discouraging this can be made to sound the better.

Yours faithfully  
RC Winton  
Creighton Avenue, N2

Send your correspondence to: "Letters Page", The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 8JA or e-mail the-archer@lineone.net.

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**How secure is our library?**

Dear Editor,

How secure is the future of our library? It has been classified as 'local'. As such, the Council in a full meeting has refused to confirm that its funding would not be reduced. In fact, cut backs have already begun. Reduced staffing. Reduced book stock. Lunch time closures. Fewer evening openings. Fewer magazines and journals. Fewer reference items.

Perhaps the changes are purely administrative. More worryingly, perhaps they are part of a deliberate plan. Run the facilities down in stages, each small enough to lessen the likelihood of an outcry, but cumulatively leading to such a decline in use that the Council can claim it is only common sense to close the library altogether. After all, if we want "to enjoy twenty-first century library, community and information technology facilities" (to use the Council's words) a 'leading' library is only a bus ride or two away.

If there is no such plan, I wonder what is the point of dividing Barnet's libraries into leading and local. The general tightening of public expenditure that is clearly on the way could eventually allow a cash-strapped Council to argue that between them the six leading libraries provide the comprehensive service required by law. So there would be no need to keep open the other, by then manifestly, second-rate and therefore underused libraries.

I suggest there are two actions we can all take to try to avoid this happening. Whenever we become aware of a reduction in facilities complain to the Leader of the Council (not to the staff, who are just as much victims of what is going on as we are). Use the library as often and as much as possible. All loans and visits are electronically recorded, and the figures influence Council decisions.

Yours faithfully,  
Leslie Gilbert,  
Chandos Road, N2

**Litter mystery deepens**

Dear Editor,

Earlier this year we also had the same distinctive litter that David Mel-some describes (The Curious Incident of Litter in the Night Time, The Archer, October 2007), along Southern Road and Shakespeare Gardens. It always appeared at night too, sometimes in a neat pile by a front garden wall, other times in the gutter.

It does seem to have stopped over the past couple of months, tying in with the new appearances in Church Vale. Perhaps whoever it is stopped because of the new CPZ around here.

Some residents thought that maybe it was a prostitute working from a car - I hope not.

Yours faithfully,  
Name and address supplied.

**Plastic with a capital P**

Dear Editor,

The proliferation of plastic bags is indeed a problem, and I sympathise with the wish to turn East Finchley into a plastic bag-free zone, but what about the problem of the hygienic disposal of soiled cat litter (or any other noxious, liquid waste)?

My cat Perkins, who pees for England and whose tray has to be changed up to four times a day, produces urine that soaks through the litter plus several layers of newspaper beneath it, and would certainly soak through the strongest of brown paper bags.

Just think of the ghastly smell that would emanate from a dustbin containing bags of leaking cat pee. The poor dustmen would have to wear gas masks! I always use recycled plastic bags for this purpose, and without them my dustbin would be a health and safety hazard.

Yours faithfully,  
Jenny Lee  
Cherry Tree Road, N2

**Look, vote and buy at CF art show**

By Nicola Sim  
Community Focus, the inclusive art centre based on level 2 at artsdepot in North Finchley, is set to showcase the work of its members and other Barnet residents in the CF Open Exhibition from 10 - 14 December.

The exhibition launch will be held on Monday 10 December from 5.30pm, with the official opening at 7.30pm. All members of the community are invited to join exhibitors for food, drinks and prize-giving.

Visitors will be able to buy the art on display, which will include photography, painting and mixed media, and even vote for their favourite work. Thirty per cent of any money raised will go towards fundraising for the charity, which in 2008 will celebrate its 30th year of providing accessible creative activities and outreach projects in Barnet.

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Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.



Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.

**Can East Finchley become a transition village?**

By Harriet Copperman

Over the last year, this paper has been seeking views on why we like living in East Finchley. For myself, having lived in Muswell Hill for 25 years, I feel like I've moved to another town altogether, though it's probably less than a mile.

Facilities and amenities include good public transport, strong community spirit, local shops and services, an independent cinema, a youth theatre, open spaces and ancient woodland, schools and further educational facilities, playing field, allotments, local voluntary newspaper and a local farmers' market.

**Careless townies**

Many readers will be aware of the issues of global warming and 'peak oil' (how do we cope when fossil fuels become increasingly rare?). Anyone with children or grandchildren should want to think about them carefully because basic life and living will become much more difficult over the next few decades. We may think that, living in London, we are shielded from floods, food shortages and loss of electricity and other fuels. In fact, we are more vulnerable than people living in rural communities who at least have some knowledge of self-sufficiency or access to the necessities of life.

As 'townies' we give scant thought to where our food comes from, the water that comes out of the tap, the light when we flick a switch or the warmth when the central heating is on. We complain if these essentials/utilities are not deemed cheap enough. The reality, however, is that we are squandering these resources literally at our children's peril.

**Planning ahead**

However, over the past few years, a new approach has developed in order to delay the impending shortages. It is called 'Transition towns and neighbourhoods'. East Finchley already has a well developed sense of community, but do we have the will to engage in a neighbourly sense in order to plan for a sustainable East Finchley in say 2020?

Would you be interested in our community working towards a degree of self-sufficiency in food and energy? It would certainly be hard work, but that is the only way anything is achieved.

We can continue to do nothing, except perhaps change our light bulbs and hope for the best, and also hope that we or our children don't end up like 80% of the world's population with no access to running water, or we can really come together as a community and 'have a go'.

Further information is available at [www.transitionculture.org](http://www.transitionculture.org). Send your thoughts about whether and how we should go forward with this concept to THE ARCHER.

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