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Letters without verifiable contact addresses will not be reviewed or printed. Contact details can be withheld, however, on request at publication.

Solicitors and advisers needed

Dear Editor,

Many of your readers are probably aware of the work of the East Finchley Advice Service (EFAS) in Church Lane. It is a charitable organisation that provides advice to residents of East Finchley and nearby areas on such matters as benefits, debt and housing problems.

Apart from a daily advice service, it has run a weekly one-hour Tuesday evening drop-in legal session staffed by qualified solicitors on a voluntary basis. Unfortunately, some of our volunteer solicitors have recently left because of illness or job changes, and we are now having to operate on a reduced basis, once every two weeks.

If there are any readers who are qualified solicitors who would be interested in volunteering their services, perhaps for one evening a month, they can contact the manager Blessyn Ataguba on 020 8444 6265, who would be happy to answer any questions.

In addition, EFAS always welcomes new volunteer advisers to help during its daytime sessions. No specific qualifications are required, although applicants should obviously show a keenness to help the less fortunate in our community and also be prepared to undertake training in such areas as welfare benefits and debt problems. Again, please contact Blessyn if you would like to learn more.

Yours faithfully,
David Miller,
Secretary, EFAS.

Don't feed these pests

Dear Editor,

It was disheartening to read Thomas McCann's letter (THE ARCHER, March 2009) condoning those who feed pigeons on the High Road corner next to Budgens, especially him questioning whether these birds pose any health hazard.

An unequivocal "Yes they do" might be the reply from many readers with knowledge of the diseases spread by feral pigeons. Yet according to Mr McCann, these pigeons 'clean' the pavements of detritus that would otherwise attract rats.

I wonder if Mr McCann would thereby advocate the feeding of rats as they might 'clean' the pavements that would otherwise attract pigeons. Maybe not, for Mr McCann seems to regard pigeons as having served us well during wartime, although these message-carriers were not the feral types that descend on our streets today.

But what a different story it might be if any rodent had played its useful part in the defence of the realm. Would there be a warm welcome to hundreds of cockroaches, lice and fleas if their gallant forebears had ever been mentioned in dispatches?

And don't forget the rabid dog. Give it a medal and the freedom of the city?

Yours faithfully,
Malcolm Griffiths,
Midhurst Avenue, N10.

Letters

In through the out door
Dear Editor,

On Friday 13 March, I had the misfortune of travelling on the 143 bus in the afternoon and attempting to get off at the bus stop outside Graham's the Butcher in East End Road. As I did, I was overwhelmed by a huge group of Bishop Douglass pupils swarming onto the bus through the exit door and disregarding passengers who were trying to get off.

As there were two prams with toddlers and elderly people on board, there was concern for their safety as additional pupils continued to push their way onto the bus. The driver refused to move as he was unable to close the doors and requested pupils to leave the bus to avoid overcrowding. When questioned if this unacceptable behaviour had been reported to the school, he replied that it happens every day.

I met with the Deputy Head of Bishop Douglass, who said that they regularly have a member of staff at the bus stop to ensure these incidents don't occur and after our meeting he went to the bus stop to check. I hope such a situation can be prevented in future.

Yours faithfully,
Name and address supplied.

No love shack

Dear Editor,

Following Barnet Council's decision to axe Cherry Tree Wood's keeper, the old keeper's hut by the tennis courts began to fall apart while it was closed indefinitely. The derelict building was a sitting duck for vandals, who graffitied it, pulled out wooden boards to set on fire, and stripped off roof tiles as though some sort of a rooftop protest has gone on.

Along with many other locals, I wanted a keeper back, so one day in February I was pleased to see new, fireproof wooden walls (similar to Lazy Sally's cafe) and a smart, new red roof had been added. Thinking we were finally getting a keeper again, I asked Sally at the cafe what was going on.

Alas, Sally suspected it was just to protect the storage space inside. This was probably why Barnet had not demolished the hut completely. While I support them vandalproofing it, we are so near yet so far from solving a problem that locals tried to stop from happening in the first place. Only Barnet would do something as illogical and stingy as this.

Yours faithfully,
Jake Eiseman-Renyard,
Fortis Green, N2.

OBITUARY



Robert Winton, MBE

The Finchley Society has announced the death on 25 February of Robert Winton, its recently retired Honorary Secretary, at the age of 94. Robert is survived by his wife, Heather, and their three children, Andrew, Peter and Carol.

Robert, who lived in Creighton Avenue, had been Secretary of the Society since 1996 and a member for much longer. He was also its press officer, providing many items of local interest and answering requests for information from many sources.

The following is an extract from The Finchley Society newsletter that marked Robert's retirement last year:

"It is difficult to express adequately our appreciation of his work but let us try. Robert has brought to the Society a rare professional zeal to see that things are done properly without any corner-cutting or fudging.

"He has produced detailed agendas for our meetings and minutes that rarely needed any comment. He has communicated very effectively with the membership on a wide range of topics and problems. He has been a fount of knowledge on procedure and has taken us through two major overhauls of our constitution.

"He has remembered to do things that most of us would have forgotten. He has, in effect, been an amazingly effective Secretary and has, more than anyone else, kept the show on the road. We are the poorer for his moving on."

'Hidden' arts centre needs higher profile

Local resident Monica Lanman has started a campaign to put artsdepot in North Finchley on the map. Here she explains why.

I was not alone in hoping that the building development on Tally Ho Corner, completed a few years ago, would provide an interesting focus for the area. Instead, what we got was a blank-walled anonymous lump with no visible name or identity.

There is a tower block, a bus station, a few odd shops plus many vacant units... and buried within it is a jewel.

Hidden jewel

The jewel is artsdepot, home to two theatres, a café and bar, an art gallery, and numerous courses in an interesting and lively space. On any day of the week you can see drama, live music, comedy, dance, an exhibition, a literary event or a family show there.

But artsdepot is desperately undernourished by its surroundings, and is not allowed to promote itself in a way that could enhance the whole site.

Signage

I volunteered a few months ago to explore the possibilities of increased signage for the venue, so that people driving round this glorified traffic island could find it more easily. It cries out for signs on the two big south-facing corners of the block, but so far

the site's developers will only give permission for signage within Nether Street.

Barnet Council hopes to develop the rest of Tally Ho in the next few years, with an enhanced pedestrian area and more interesting shops and cafes. But right now artsdepot suffers from a serious lack of external visibility. The whole site suffers badly from a lack of the creative vision that could make it an attractive location for customers and businesses alike.

We are so lucky in Barnet to have our very own arts centre but if no one knows where it is, how is artsdepot expected to survive and grow? Please join me to help raise artsdepot's profile.

Monica's campaign has the backing of artsdepot itself. If you can help, we will pass on messages to Monica. Our contact details are on page 2.

Pigeon post extra

As you may or may not have realised, our story by Diana Boyd on page 5 about pigeons being drafted into the postal service was an April fool.

Sorry if you're reading this way after 1 April and weren't on your guard. We didn't want to get any readers in a flap.

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