



## Parking permit system in chaos

By Diana Cormack

Technical problems with Barnet Council's changes in the system for acquiring parking permits have caused consternation and confusion to some residents living within Controlled Parking Zones.

The idea was that those with access to the internet would "have the option to renew, apply, amend and print their own parking permits from the comfort of their own home". Alternatively, people could telephone a new, automated permit line to have permits sent by post.

### Long delays

This was to start on 1 April, with the previous two-week grace period being cancelled as residents would be expected to renew on time. For many that proved to be impossible. With both the website and the automated telephone line not working properly, the borough's parking team was inundated with calls, with consequent delays to phones being answered.

John Plummer, a newsagent in the High Road, waited for well over an hour. "My phone was literally hot," he told *THE ARCHER*.

Callers were advised that the Civil Enforcement Officers (traffic wardens) had been informed of the situation and

that a note should be put in vehicles to the effect that the relevant permit had been applied for. Some were also told to apply by posting a cheque and, if they did get a Penalty Charge Notice, it would be revoked.

The parking call centre was receiving over a thousand calls a day, so a backlog of requests for permits has to be dealt with. If Barnet had installed a recorded message about the system failure presumably a great waste of time and money could have been avoided. Those manning the phones would also have been saved a lot of unproductive time and trouble. Perhaps Barnet should reimburse the cost of customers' phone calls with a free book of Visitor Vouchers?

### July 2008 questionnaire results

Nothing yet. At the time of writing, Barnet Council told *THE ARCHER*: "a letter should be going out to residents regarding the East Finchley Controlled Parking Zones before the end of the month".

## Supermarket plan shelved for good

By Janet Maitland

The Planning Inspectorate has dismissed an appeal against Barnet Council's decision not to give planning permission for a supermarket at Stag Court, opposite the library.

"It's been a lot of work and it's cost me a lot of money, but that's business," said the applicant, who asked not to be named. He has decided not to challenge the decision.

When the application was first submitted last June, many local people petitioned against it, fearing that a supermarket would threaten other shops. Those who supported the supermarket, mainly older residents, felt that it would save them a long walk to the centre.

Barnet refused the application because it was thought to be detrimental to the vitality and viability of the rest of the High Road and would cause traffic problems. They also could find no evidence that the site had been marketed for its current use as offices. An appeal was lodged with the Planning Inspectorate last November.

### Inspector's assessment

"I have no doubt that a supermarket would be a convenience, especially for older people, but no cogent evidence of unmet need has been provided," said Robin Brooks, the inspector, who visited the site earlier this year and noted

the number of convenience food stores nearby.

"I share this view with my colleagues who dismissed appeals relating to a retail sales building at the nearby Leopold Service Station." The applications referred to were submitted by Tesco in 2002 and 2004.

### Parking problems

Mr Brooks also thought that the High Road looked "fairly fragile" and considered that a supermarket would make this worse by diverting trade away from established shops. He acknowledged that offices would employ more local people than a supermarket, but could not find any evidence of active marketing for this use.

He also thought that customers trying to park in residential streets already subject to severe parking pressures could result in a "potentially dangerous" situation.

"A supermarket would just lead to a spiral of decline," said Mr CP Shah of Church Lane, who had opposed the application.

The site is currently boarded up from the inside.

## Westminster Morris Men come to East Finchley

By John Dearing

The Westminster Morris Men toured East Finchley on the evening of 20 May, visiting some of its pubs. They performed a selection of their dance repertoire for the entertainment of pub regulars and passers-by.

The tradition of Morris Dancing goes back to the Middle Ages, when folk took part in morris dances, especially at Whitsun. The Westminster Morris was formed in 1953, and first danced out on Coronation Day.

The team has made a tour of Highgate for a number of years, but decided this year that it was time to move on. Highgate's loss became East Finchley's gain.

### Pub crawl with a difference

Starting at The Windsor Castle in The Walks, they danced in the street outside the pub, to the sound of their two melodeon players. They dance in the style of *Cotswold Morris*, which involves the use of handkerchiefs and sticks. Much merry banter was exchanged with onlookers, who were also urged to make a contribution to the team's funds.

Next stop was The Five Bells in East End Road. One of the highlights here was a dance called The Rose where a young woman celebrating her birthday joins them for the dance, but to find out what happens next,



Photo by John Dearing

readers will have to attend next time.

For the final visit of the evening, the team trooped round to The Old White Lion. Dancing outside the front of the pub soon attracted quite a crowd, some of whom joined in, to everybody's amusement.

Then, lo and behold, a mythical beast emerged from the shadows: a Unicorn, who proceeded to accost young women onlookers, demanding a kiss.

Overall, the tour was a great success and we hope they will return to East Finchley around this time next year.

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