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Photo by Steve Gorton

Tee in the garden

By Angela Anderson

What would you do if you disliked gardening? Call in a makeover team or pave over the entire garden? One enterprising East Finchley couple contacted the British Minigolf Association to find out whether they could have a minigolf course built in their back garden.

They were put in touch with miniature golf design specialists Urban Crazy (www.urbancrazy.com), based at Staples Corner. Jon Angel designed a slick, imaginative mini course for their back garden, incorporating features based on his clients' interests and using natural elements, such as old chimney pots to hold plants chosen to attract insects.

Ingenious features

Part of one hole involves hitting the ball up into a channel which moves wind chimes located in a traditional garden shed, emerging into a conduit which rings another set of chimes. The golf course takes up most of the back garden but a central water feature of Highland stone and cobbles, bench, plants and shrubs, makes it a very pleasant space in which to sit.

Forget seaside crazy golf with weather beaten windmills and gaping clowns' mouths into which to putt the ball, this is a beautifully designed space using the latest minigolf course materials and imaginatively and skillfully interpreted by Capital Garden Landscapes in Highgate.

Minigolfers united

Members of The British Minigolf Association team were at the course's 'open day' on 7 August, enjoying playing the game in an urban city space surrounded by other similarly sized gardens. Richard Gottfried

of the BMA explained that they were an association of amateurs and semi-professionals and he had played in competitions and tournaments both nationally and internationally. "It is a recognised sport for those who wish to pursue it as a game or a fun way of spending time with

family and friends." Most minigolf courses are in public spaces. This unique one in East Finchley is not open to the public but the owners intend to use it to raise money for charity through the National Gardens Scheme and other charitable events.

East Finchley: clone town?

As part of his studies for a Master's degree Paul Faulkner is producing a documentary on "clone towns", the phenomenon whereby towns lose their individual identity as they become increasingly populated by the same handful of chain stores. A think tank has suggested that East Finchley is one of the towns that have managed to retain some distinctiveness in terms of its shops. Paul came to the area to interview someone who isn't concerned about the spread of clone towns and someone else who is. That someone else was Roger Chapman and here are his views:

One of the things that attracted me to live in East Finchley over 25 years ago was the diversity and character of the High Road. Today East Finchley High Road remains a distinctive and attractive town centre with lots of independent shops and services.

But elsewhere in London and nationally the inexorable rise of the chain store has resulted in identikit urban environments: "clone towns". Homogenised high streets create a retail infrastructure that is hostile to small independent businesses.

Is this something we should be bothered about? What is wrong with the loss of small shops and services if a weekly or fortnightly car trip to a superstore can meet our needs?

Why we should be concerned

The benefits of small shops and neighbourhood shopping areas extend beyond the convenience of being able to buy food and access services within walking distance.

They provide a wider social and economic role and one that is central to a sustainable neighbourhood. Over 50 per cent of the turnover of independent retailers goes back into the local community, compared to just five per cent from supermarkets. They also meet the needs of the disadvantaged, socially excluded and elderly, particularly those with a lack of mobility. A few years ago local people fought off a proposal for a large Waitrose superstore in East Finchley, recognising the damage it would do to High Road businesses and to the local character of our neighbourhood. But the threats from supermarkets, rising rents and an unsympathetic planning system remain.

Retaining the independent businesses in our High Road means using them on a regular basis. We need to encourage and promote the benefits of shopping locally. Numerous schemes such as the 'wedge card', Brixton pound and 'shop local' campaigns have been trialled elsewhere in London. Maybe it's time we worked out a scheme for East Finchley - or do we just get in the car and pop down to Colney Hatch Lane?

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