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THE ARCHER




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Tenants circle Park House

By Janet Maitland

Another chapter in the chequered history of Park House has begun. On 13 January, Barnet Council agreed that the prime site opposite the tube station can be let for office use for a maximum of five years. The council building, which has become increasingly dilapidated since the last tenants left in August 2007, will finally produce some income.

The letting will also buy Barnet the time to consider the long-term future of Park House. Although major national companies may want to develop the site in the long term, the five-year let will allow time for smaller local organisations to bid too.

A council spokesman said: "We are looking to let the building to one of four interested parties subject to due diligence being completed."

Short lets unworkable

Council officers say the value of Park House lies in its development potential, not in the current building. However, because of the poor economic climate, it is not attracting the level of interest needed to sell it. Expressions of interest have been received but have been unacceptably low. Two-year lets have proved too short to enable prospective tenants to recoup the investment needed to improve the poor state of the building. It is hoped a five-year lease will provide enough time for the council to investigate the best development options.

Rousing local enterprise

Councillor Colin Rogers believes several competing bids are likely, from big national companies interested in developing retail or residential premises. However, he hopes a spirit of localism will be fired up. "With the talent and

organisational ability available in East Finchley, smaller organisations and community enterprises should be able to do something about the future of Park House, rather than a major national redeveloping the site."

Local resident James Elliot, who wrote to *THE ARCHER* in January complaining that Barnet was making no real effort to sell or let Park House, is still concerned. "We don't yet know who will be the tenants for the next five years. It could be a big national, putting a foot in the door by renting office space. The five-year let may be the council stalling, waiting for the big fish to come along."

Near misses

In 2005 local protests led to the withdrawal of a developer's proposal to build a superstore with parking on site, including adjoining land up to Baronsmere Road, backed up by the threat of compulsory purchase.

Later it looked as if The Institute would buy Park House, but they were unable to proceed and vacated the building when their temporary lease expired in 2007. Subsequently, development company Cathedral exchanged contracts for the site in early 2008, but decided to withdraw from the sale for legal reasons.



Artists and film-makers Denise Wyllie and Clare O Hagan pictured with David Jason at Monaco's 2010 Angel Film Festival. Full story on page 5.

Decision day on council services and charges

Barnet Council is expected to make a number of decisions on its 2011 spending plans at a cabinet meeting on 14 February. These are likely to affect many local services and amenities, including parking charges, children's centres and allotments.

Parking charges

If you live within a Controlled Parking Zone, you may see a sharp increase in charges. Barnet Council is proposing to increase the annual charge for a first car from £42 to £100 and for a second car from £75 to £125. A book of ten vouchers for visitors may rise from £10 to £48.

The cost of pay and display on-street parking is also set to rise but the situation is more complex.

Full details of the proposed changes can be found on the Council's website: (http://committeepapers.barnet.gov.uk/democracy/documents/getdoc_ext.asp?DocID=88900)

A petition against the parking charge increases can be found at www.gopetition.com/petition/41889.html.

Newstead: wait and see

As we reported last month, an announcement is anticipated resulting from the council's consultation with users of the borough's 21 children's centres. Towards the end of last year, shocked local parents and carers set up an action group when they learned that Newstead Children's Centre in Fallow's Close was under threat from budget cuts (www.savenewstead.com)

Since then two proposals have been put forward. One is to keep 13 of the centres open; the other is to retain nine centres with four satellites. Both proposals would

allow Newstead Children's Centre to survive, but as yet nothing is definite.

Allotment rents treble

There are concerns that Barnet Council is planning a steep rise in allotment rents. The cost of a standard-sized plot would go up from about £60 a year to £170 for Barnet residents and £340 for people

living outside the borough.

Last minute lobbying by allotment holders across Barnet has made the council defer the rise from this April until April 2012 but they are still angry at the size of the increase. An e-petition of protest organised by the allotment Federation can be accessed at www.barnetalotments.org.uk

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