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THE ARCHER




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A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.

Save our library!

By Ann Bronkhorst

Passing drivers hooted their support for the crowd outside East Finchley Library on Saturday 5 February: a scene repeated nationwide in a day of protest against the threats to libraries and library services.

More than 200 local residents heard campaigner Polly Napper's rousing defence of the well-used East Finchley Library as vital to local families, the elderly, people with reduced mobility and those looking for work. She urged the council to avoid the "massive injustice" of closing smaller branches and centralising services to a few larger libraries.

Local writers speak out

Poet, former librarian and local resident Fleur Adcock,

a six-year-old child and added firmly: "You've got to be able to walk to your local library; it's a civic amenity."

Anne-Marie Conway, local children's author and mother of two young children, described the threatened cuts in the library service as "criminal...like going back to the Dark Ages." For her family, to have a bag full of books is normal. She appreciates East Finchley Library's provision of something for every age group and wants the service developed,

mother of three young boys said that her eldest had learned to read, and to love books, because of the stimulating displays in the children's section, which that afternoon was packed.

Future events

Free events this spring, organised by EFLUG, will support and celebrate the library. On 19 March, 2-4 pm, there will be readings by Fleur Adcock and Peter Hart, author and Oral Historian at the Imperial War Museum, with a short presentation about the East Finchley Oral History Project, due to launch this year.

For children of 7-11, children's authors Anne-Marie Conway (Star Makers' Club) and Jonny Zucker (Max Flash) will read from their work on 2 April, 2-4 pm

On 29 March a report is due on Barnet's library consultation, with branch closures a likely outcome. To be kept informed of events, protests and plans join the EFLUG mailing list via pollynapper@btinternet.com or join East Finchley Library Users Group at www.eflug.org.uk. A video of the protest is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=EesyEdIhxXE.



Protesters make their voices heard outside the threatened Finchley Youth Theatre. Photo by Ken Osborne.

Save our theatre!

By John Lawrence

Young people and their parents are battling desperately to safeguard the future of drama groups at Finchley Youth Theatre, threatened by council budget cuts. At a protest rally outside the High Road theatre on 25 January they called for the theatre's services to be protected.

Proposed cuts to Barnet Council's Youth Services budget would remove all part-time staff at the theatre. Only one full-time manager would remain, which campaigners say is not enough to run the weekly dance and drama sessions. The future of the building itself will probably be reviewed next year.

Renovation

Finchley Youth Theatre, formerly known as The Barnet Drama Centre, was set up in the 1950s. Following a major fire in 1991, the building was rescued by Barnet Youth Services and renamed. Two more refurbishments have taken place since then. Only last year, the building had a £120,000 renovation creating a new auditorium and a dance studio with a sprung floor.

Inclusive and welcoming

FYT stages ambitious productions of shows involving all its members, including West Side Story and Carmen. Catherine Atkinson has a 15-year-old daughter with a learning disability who regularly attends the theatre's sessions. Catherine said: "It's her social life and the only place where she feels included and really welcomed. There won't be enough money or manpower to run the groups. If the theatre goes, there will be nothing left for young people in East Finchley."

Former member Megan Fellows said it had always been a thriving organisation at the centre of East Finchley. She said: "FYT is not only a theatre group but also a means of support and guidance for the young community."

Council response

Barnet Council said the theatre will continue to offer services to young people using a "multi-agency" approach, involving voluntary workers and youth workers spread across several different venues in Barnet, but could not specify whether the services would match current ones.

In a statement, Councillor Andrew Harper, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Families, said: "I know the FYT is held in high regard, not least for its role in promoting inclusion and interaction between those with and without disabilities, and for this reason the theatre will continue to offer services to young people."

See the public opinion on page 4, and Letters on page 11.



Protesters say a well-used library like East Finchley's should not be threatened by cuts. Photo by John Lawrence.

OBE, emphasised the importance of libraries to the development of all writers. She recalled the joy of browsing through books "in a little tin shack in Surrey" as

not closed down.

Inside the building, protesters of all ages were signing the 'Save Barnet's Libraries' petition and queuing to borrow books. One

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