



East Finchley Festival threatened

The future of East Finchley's Festival is under threat. As *THE ARCHER* went to press, we heard that Barnet Council was considering imposing charges for events held in parks, which could be in excess of £1,000. Until now, there has been no charge for community events like the festival.

Future events will be priced mainly by estimated attendance, though a discount may be applied to the daily rate for charitable/community events at the discretion of the Director for Environment and Operations.

"Outrageous"

Roger Chapman from the Festival Committee said: "The Cabinet Resources Committee considered a report on fees on 13 January. This contained a separate category for community events in parks chargeable at £56 per day plus VAT, but this has disappeared from the version going to Cabinet. "We are contacting the Council urgently to find out how this will affect us, and to see if we can negotiate a reduction. To go from charging nothing to charging over £1,000 for a one-day community event is outrageous. We will keep people in touch on our discussions with the Council on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/pages/East-Finchley-Festival/270157876374".

For nearly 40 years the festival has been a huge event in East Finchley, bringing together local people and attracting growing numbers from outside the area. This year it is scheduled for Sunday 19 June.

Could you help Home-Start?

Home-Start Barnet is a charity based in Finchley that supports local families with children under five years old. Many families are struggling with issues including depression, isolation, multiple births, illness, immigration, disability or simply managing family life.

Home-Start Barnet trains volunteers to visit families regularly in their own homes, usually once a week for three hours. The volunteer and the family decide together when to meet and how the time will be spent. Sometimes a parent may want someone to listen, someone to talk to, or even

just someone to share an adult conversation.

Confidence boost

Volunteers provide non-judgmental, practical and emotional support and help build the family's confidence and ability to cope.

If you think you could be a volunteer for the N2 or N3 areas and are happy to attend a training course, please contact the charity. You do not need any specific skills; the only requirement is to be a parent yourself and to have a genuine desire to help someone. The office number is 020 8371 0674 and the website is www.homestartbarnet.org.

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Gang terrorises allotment holders

By Janet Maitland

A gang of youths has been terrorising plot holders on Vale Farm allotments at the end of Tarling Road. On 30 January, the fire brigade was called out to two separate arson attacks, which destroyed four sheds. Another shed was burnt to the ground on 4 February.

The gang also threatened a 77-year-old allotment holder on 2 February, pelting him with objects and then chasing him off the site. All of the youths wore black scarves across their faces except one. He is described as very tall, with chiselled features, a prominent straight nose, dark hair and a Mediterranean or mixed race appearance.

Residents of nearby Borrowdale Close have reported having their front doors kicked and seeing the gang running round the allotments late at night. "I fear for the safety of my family, our neighbourhood and plot holders," said one resident.

Council response

A Barnet Council representative met with the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) in early February to discuss security at the site. A council spokesman said: "These sorts of incidents are infrequent, with the plots kept secure using padlocked iron gates and high fencing." He said damaged fencing would be replaced as soon as possible.

"Vale Farm is a particularly vulnerable site," said Richard



One of the burnt-out sheds at Vale Farm Allotments. Photo by Lois Lawrence

King, Secretary of Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies. "It needs a higher level of protection and better maintenance than the council has been able to provide. It is not reasonable to expect a handful of volunteers to tackle a backlog of problems like this at their own expense. And to have to pay three times the rent for such a poor facility would be extraordinary." The crisis at Vale Farm coincides with council proposals to increase allotment rents from £33 a year for a full sized plot to over £93.

Extra security

The SNT say they have now made the security of the site a priority, assigning it to a Community Support Officer as a specific patrol duty. Two other officers have also been patrolling in plain clothes. Matt Clee, the new sergeant running the SNT, has also sought help from other police teams such as the Priority Intervention Team, supplying them with details of the suspects. "They'll target the hotspots and suspects at various times, day and night," he said.

This approach began to pay off on the evening of 9 February, when two youths were arrested shortly after hoax calls about the allotments were made to the police and the fire brigade. Mobile numbers were quickly traced and the phones in question were then found on youths near the allotments.

If you have any information about these incidents, please contact police on 0300 123 12 12, quoting crime reference number 2402529/11. To remain anonymous, call Crime Stoppers on 0800 555 111. You can also contact the SNT on 020 7161 9014 or 07887 632767 or email them at EastFinchley.snt@met.police.uk

Allotment holders speak out

By Janet Maitland

THE ARCHER spoke to several plot holders about the assaults and damage at Vale Farm allotments. Here's what they had to say:

Sadly, many of the allotment holders at Vale Farm feel too frightened to continue with their plots. "I planted four apple trees there ten years ago and I feel so sad that I won't be able to enjoy them any more," said one.

One lady is giving up her plot after 11 years at Vale Farm. She said: "My shed was burned down. Part of the problem is that the site is tucked away at the end of a road so it's easy for them to get away with it. We need people to make complaints against the gang and the police need evidence so they can bring charges."

Another plot holder saw the attacks and damage as the result of Barnet Council's neglect of the site over many years, echoing fears elsewhere in East Finchley that green land is being eyed for sell-off. "The

council's won, haven't they? They've neglected this site for years and they just want it for development."

One plot holder said that the allotments could never be an impregnable fortress because fences, bolts and barbed wire would never deter people with no qualms about vandalising property.

Stella Burnett, who used to be secretary at Vale Farm, said that the best protection came from a fully occupied site, with well-cultivated plots where there are people around. "Too many of our plots are derelict or have been vacated and not re-let," she said.

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