



Letters to the Editor

Challenge these charges

Dear Editor,

The February edition of *THE ARCHER* reported that CPZ charges are to be increased from 1 April 2011. The impact will be severe. For example, any CPZ resident who has a daily child-minder or carer will be paying over £1,000 in charges per annum for visitors' vouchers.

The aim of these new charges is to increase revenue from CPZ residents to pay for road maintenance across the borough of Barnet. This seems grossly discriminatory to a small minority (perhaps only 3.5%). A number of residents, therefore, attended the Cabinet Meeting on 14 February.

The meeting was a fiasco. We submitted questions in advance and councillors had written answers that did not answer the questions. They claimed not to know, for example, how many residents in Barnet live in CPZs. They claimed there had been a full public consultation since 8 December. There was no mention of the e-petition with 4,000+ signatures against the charges. They claimed there has been a fully comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on how the new charges affect vulnerable groups, for example, women, the elderly and disabled. The committee then went on to approve the new charges as from 1 April 2011.

There are a group of residents who are taking up a legal challenge on the matter. Anyone who is concerned about the charges can sign the e-petition at www.gopetition.com/petition/41889.html. Residents can also write to the Local Government Ombudsman via www.lgo.org.uk/ as Barnet has a duty to engage and consult with us appropriately.

Yours faithfully,
Debbie Linton,
Summerlee Avenue, N2.

I can't afford new parking charges

Dear Editor,

I am 90 years old, pay my taxes and receive no benefits after living here for 54 years. This appalling decision to try increasing the charge for me and my friends and families to park outside my own house is detrimental to my wellbeing and standard of life.

The reason us residents required these parking restrictions in the first place was to stop commuters parking in our streets all day, not as a way of the council generating money, which it does not invest in Barnet but other countries' banks that have now gone bust.

Please, Barnet Council, reverse your plans as I cannot afford to pay them.

Yours faithfully,
Mrs A L Reed,
Park Hall Rd, N2.

Unjustifiable rise in parking charges

Dear Editor,

Barnet Council has really excelled itself with its proposed increase in the cost of parking outside our own homes. It must think that its residents are a milch cow to be milked continuously and that we will meekly pay up! Unfortunately, all too often we have no choice and will have to do so.

However, they have gone too far with the cost of the Visitors' Parking vouchers which have been increased 400% from £12 a book of 10 vouchers to £48. This increase will affect senior

citizens in particular, many of whom do not have cars, but still need a supply of these vouchers for their visitors, whether they be family members, workmen or professionals like District Nurses etc.

Cllr Brian Coleman complains that residents in the Suburb are objecting to the price increase, but they are not isolated objectors, residents throughout the Borough are objecting, there is unity amongst us. We particularly object to this increase when (a) only this last week Norman Baker MP the Under Secretary of State for the Department of Transport assured listeners to BBC Radio 4 that there would be no reduction in the funding from his Department to local Councils for the upkeep of roads, despite government cuts elsewhere, and (b) councillors get free parking around the Borough and (c) Cllr Coleman is renowned for his claims for his travel (taxi) expenses - out of our Rates!

Yes, I know these expenses relate to his work with the London Assembly, but don't forget part of OUR Council Tax goes towards the Assembly, so WE are paying for him. While I suspect most of us would expect a realistic increase in the cost of our Residents Parking Charge the proposed 138% increase from £42 to £100 for the first car is not just obscene: it is immoral and cannot be justified. Think again Barnet.

Yours faithfully,
Joyce Arram

Summerlee Gardens, N2

Editor's note: East Finchley's three ward councillor's have waived their right to free parking.

Disproportionate increases

Dear Editor,

The proposed increases to CPZ charges across Barnet are disproportionate. The cost of residents' parking permits will increase from £40 to £100 for the first car, and from £70 to £170 for the second car. Furthermore, a single visitors' voucher will increase 400% from £1 each to £4 each.

Any residents who have day-care, whether elderly or for young children, will have to pay an extra £4 a day, on top of paying extra for anyone else who may come to visit them by car that day. The price for parking each year could easily run into £100s if not £1,000s extra a year for some residents.

There is an on-line petition against these proposals. If 7,000 people provide signatures across Barnet this is the threshold to force a dedicated debate of the council. Please make time to sign this if you are against the increased parking charges at www.gopetition.com/petition/41889.html

Yours faithfully,
Dr D Linton,
Summerlee Avenue, N2.

Only one way to save Stanley Field

Dear Editor,

I have been involved in the effort to save the Stanley Road Playing Field since I moved into East Finchley in 2006. Furthermore I am an academic expert in game theory. I believe that the stated intention of Barnet Council to sell the playing field is largely the consequence of our incorrect strategy to save it.

The logic of our political system is straightforward: East Finchley is a solid Labour ward, we are not part of the calculus of the Conservative Party

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to retain power in Barnet. Furthermore they are committed to saving money for the Borough.

It appears that the only way to save the field is to present a viable business plan that involves sports rather than housing. However, the recent decision of the council to sell the field reflects the fact that the most lucrative use of the field is selling it off for housing. Furthermore the Conservative Party rejects a "business as usual" attitude which in previous times would have led to a decision to save the field for sports.

However, all hope is not lost: the council is committed to providing top services to all residents of the borough, regardless of whether they vote for the Conservative Party. They cannot appear to be following the above-mentioned logic of our political system, nor can they appear to care more about balancing the books than about the right of our children to play.

And precisely because the logic which dictates a sale for residential development is locally binding, the field can be saved only through big events that bring national attention to their contradictions in public policy.

If this approach were pursued vigorously in the next few months there would be a reasonable chance to save our field for our children.

Yours faithfully,
Dr Robert Samuel Simon
London School of Economics
London, WC2A.

Don't bring the curtain down on FYT

Dear Editor,

As a proud former member of Finchley Youth Theatre (FYT), I am deeply upset with the proposed changes to such an important institution. Having attended FYT since the age of 15, and leaving only this year to pursue a university course in the arts, I cannot imagine an East Finchley without the young thriving artistic community it has rightfully gained.

FYT is not only a theatre group but also a means of support and guidance for the young community. What sets FYT apart from other theatre groups is its work with young disabled people: weekly drama and dance workshops are held, often leading to a showcase at the end of term for parents and friends. These groups allow participants to socialise and express themselves creatively and give parents a chance to meet other parents in similar situations: in turn creating a supportive community.

What's more, once a year the FYT community all pulls together to create a spectacular full-scale show. Past performances have included West Side Story in which a cast of 60 students performed, 15 of whom were young disabled people. FYT's pioneering inclusive work reflects its identity as a community. Unfortunately, this community is at risk of disintegration.

Yours faithfully,
Megan Fellows,
Address supplied.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column. Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



Tick-box religion

By Alison Stein

Around 25 million households in England and Wales will shortly receive their census forms, with the option either to fill in the paper forms or to complete them online. Nearly all the questions are compulsory but one is optional: the question about religion.

In 2001 respondents were asked: "What is your religion?" 72% responded "Christian." Where's the harm in that, you ask? Well, as leading questions go it's not blatant, but it presupposes that we all have a religion.

What's more, the high percentage of people who ticked the "Christian" box, set against falling church attendance and evidence from other surveys on belief and practice, suggests that the data included not only fully-fledged believers, but also people with a vague cultural affiliation; for example, people who were brought up in a particular religion but no longer believe in it, or those who think "I don't go to church but I was baptised as a baby so perhaps I should tick the 'Christian' box."

Misleading data

The result is that the question has produced data that massively overestimates the religiosity of people in this country. This same data is used by the authorities and others to justify an exaggerated focus on religion in public policy; for example, the creation of more faith schools and the sub-contracting of social services to religious providers. And guess what? The same biased question will be reused in this month's 2011 census.

How do we know the numbers are wrong? Well, virtually all other reputable opinion polls say so. Consider, for instance, the latest British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) published earlier this year but conducted in 2009. When the BSA asked the non-leading question, "Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?" 50.7% of those surveyed claimed to be non-religious. Only 43.7% said they were Christian, while the remaining 5% belonged to non-Christian religions.

Humanists, who are non-religious but have strong ethical beliefs, face a dilemma when it comes to answering the census question on religion. For the 2011 census the British Humanist Association is urging anyone who is not religious to tick the "No Religion" box. If they and other non-religious people choose this option, the data produced by this census may be less distorted. This may reduce the number of situations where, based on inaccurate statistics, local councils and central Government give undue weight to religious interests, and too little to genuine community cohesion and equal treatment under the law for believers and non-believers alike. More information is available at www.census-campaign.org.uk.

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