



How to spot a dodgy builder

By Janet Maitland

Barnet Borough Watch has issued a warning about dodgy builders. These are the kind that call at your house because they've spotted some loose tiles on your roof or claim to have some Tarmac left over from doing a neighbour's drive, or that your TV aerial looks unsafe.

Such builders then charge huge amounts of money for shoddy workmanship or even for doing no work at all. They target the unwary and the vulnerable.

The best way of finding a reputable builder is to ask neighbours, friends and family for a recommendation. You can also use Trustmark by phoning 08454 040506 or visiting www.trustmark.org.uk. This is a government backed initiative to help consumers find reliable local tradesmen, supported by the Trading Standards Institute.

Ten top tips

Rated People (www.ratedpeople.com), another organisation that helps you find a reputable tradesman in your area, has some useful advice on how to spot a dodgy builder. Their first piece of advice is, in fact, to avoid anyone who knocks on your door, because good builders are busy builders. They don't

need, or have the time, to look for work in this way.

They also recommend not employing anyone in an unmarked van, anyone who is eager to quote quickly and cheaply without looking properly at the job, or anyone who says they can make the job cheaper as they've got leftover materials from another job. You can also recognise a cowboy builder because they never commit to a specific schedule and will probably ask for cash up-front. They will also rarely sign anything or give you a receipt.

Before anyone starts work you should always have a written note of what they will be doing and what it will cost. You should also have their full contact details, including a landline telephone number. If you are asked for any payment in advance for materials, the amount should never be more than 10% of the total cost.

Allotments for disabled people

The Finchley Horticultural Society has created a number of raised beds on the Gordon Road Allotment in Finchley, N3, for people whose disabilities prevent them from gardening at ground level.

Working with Disability Action in Barnet and other local charities, it is hoped this therapeutic resource will benefit wheelchair users, people with restricted mobility, the visually impaired and those recovering from strokes, amongst others.

The facility will be available this spring. Each bed is 7.2m long but can be sub-divided. The beds are 1.2m wide and of varying heights, with the area between them newly paved for easy movement. There are water supplies, lockable tool storage bins and compost bins.

Gordon Road is half a mile

from Finchley Central tube station. The site is close to the 382 and 326 bus routes. The site has parking, an accessible toilet, a rain shelter, meeting room, small seasonal shop, wheelbarrows, mowers, woodchip and compost. The annual cost is £6.35 rent per bed plus a service charge which includes water of £5 per bed. There is a 50% discount on rent for those over 60. Membership charge is £8 (£5 if over 60). There is a key deposit of £12. For more information, ring Andrew Brown on 020 8346 5011 or email a.brown@cvni.org.uk



The library inauguration. Photo by Gina Bailey

Ethiopia library opens its doors

Readers may recall articles written over the last two years about the work of the Aysanew Kassa Trust in Azezo, Ethiopia, especially the fundraising activities for a public library and internet cafe.

This project was very generously supported by St Mary's Catholic Church in East Finchley during 2010/11, where the congregation gave a huge boost to help the completion of the project.

The library was inaugurated with great excitement by the local community in Azezo in October 2011 and 12 friends from the UK were present. Jean Bailey, of East Finchley, chairman of the AKT, formally handed it to the local govern-

ment officials to run on behalf of the people at a very lively ceremony.

A 10-foot container carrying books, educational materials and personal computers is being shipped over the next couple of months.

If you want to know more about the Aysanew Kassa Trust activities, you can visit www.aysanew.org.uk. Jean will also undertake talks to groups and can be contacted on 020 8883 8722.

Credit union offers safe finances

The North West London Credit Union has launched a savings and loans service for Barnet residents.

Based in East Finchley's Green Man Centre, Strawberry Vale, the Credit Union is an alternative to high street banks and unsuitable credit agents in the area. Barnet Council employees are part of the scheme and entitled to join the CU directly through payroll deduction schemes. More than £3.5 million has gone out on loan so far. To find out more, visit www.nwlcu.co.uk or telephone 020 8200 0770.

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