



A turning point for the Old Barn?

By Janet Maitland

A three-year controversy over the management of the Old Barn community centre in Tarling Road has reached a turning point. Local people have been campaigning to return the centre to the community ever since it was taken over in 2010. Now they might finally be given a voice in how it is run.

For over 25 years the Old Barn was a busy hub of community events and activities, with a focus on pioneering services for children and young people. Shortly after a group of new trustees led by Reverend Geoffrey Muhoro took it over in 2010, services such as the thriving Monday Club Youth group found themselves homeless.

In 2011, nearly 100 local people applied to become members of the Old Barn to ensure the management ran services the community needed, but the applications were not accepted by the new trustees.

Charity Commission involvement

Over the last year, Barnet Council has been working closely with the trustees to resolve the under-utilisation of the building and to ensure compliance with all the terms of the lease. The Charity Commission has also become involved. It has directed the trustees to hold an AGM in order to provide an opportunity to increase the representation of the local community on the management committee.

"We were heartened to hear that the Rev Muhoro has proposed an AGM on 21 July as there are many local residents who would like to become members and put their skills and expertise to good use," said local campaigner Will Hudson. "It is so sad that this valuable

resource is no longer being used in the way it was intended."

AGM mystery

But at the time of going to press, Mr Hudson said that although 22 people had contacted the Old Barn for membership forms, to his knowledge not one person had received a copy of the membership form or details of the time or venue of the AGM.

"The matter is now back with the Charity Commission," he added. "They have assigned an officer to help support the Old Barn Trustees to fulfil their governance obligations."

Farewell to a much-loved head

By Paul Woolwich

She has cared for other people's children for half a century and spent the last 25 years running a top-rated Muswell Hill pre-school dedicated to giving infants the best possible start in their education. Now headteacher Shirley Welton is packing it in... almost.

The parents and carers whose children attend St James's Pre-School, Fortis Green Road, were shocked to hear that Mrs Welton had decided to hand over the reins at the end of this summer term to spend more time looking after her husband, who is seriously ill.

"It's very sad that I have to give it up," she said, "but I am not disappearing altogether. I'll be on hand to give advice and help when called on to do so."

When Mrs Welton took over the pre-school, based in the Birchwood Centre, in September 1989, facilities were shabby and there was no garden for the children to play in.

Over the years, the former Dr Barnardo's nursery school teacher transformed the place, making it one of the most sought-after pre-schools in north London.

During her time as headteacher over 1,200 children have been touched by Mrs Welton's kindness and her devotion to learning through play; their lives have been enriched by the experience.

In a tribute letter to parents the Pre-school Committee wrote: "Her dedication and constant involvement in the pre-school have been outstanding. She has worked tirelessly to ensure the pre-school is a happy and caring environment for all the hundreds of children who have passed through the doors."



Shirley Welton is retiring from St James' Pre-School. Photo by Yvonne Chakraborty



Nino Rocha Santos caring for the plants. Photo by Diana Cormack

A platform for flowers

By Sheila Armstrong

As already reported in THE ARCHER, East Finchley station is entering TFL's Station in Bloom competition with the unstinting help of the N2 Gardeners, and donations from local sponsors and commuters.

This year the theme has been 150 Years of London Underground and judging was taking place on 18 July, just as we went to press.

Nino Rocha Santos, who works at the station, took us on a tour in early July pointing out where the new plants and tubs will go. The colour theme is red, white and blue, the colours of the London Underground roundel.

Station bank to the right of the station entrance, the garden that the volunteers of N2 Gardeners have been cultivating for some years, was entered in to the Cultivated Garden section of the competition for the first time this year. New helpers and contributions to the cost of the plants for the competition are also welcome. To help in any way, contact the group by email at N2gardeners@gmail.com or read the blog at http://n2gardeners.blogspot.com

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