



At last! The Old Barn is reclaimed

By Janet Maitland

The Old Barn is back in safe hands at last. Staff from social and community group Mobilise, who've been appointed as interim trustees, cut through the padlocked gates and reclaimed the deserted building on 31 October. Security guards are now protecting the centre until it reopens. All the files found in the office have been sent to the Charity Commission as possible evidence of fraud.

Some of the local residents and councillors who've been campaigning for years to reclaim the Old Barn marched through the gates a few days later. "At last justice has been done," said Maureen Clemetson, who used to run the Monday Youth Club before the previous 'trustees' discontinued it, as they did all the Old Barn services, when they took over the centre in 2010.

The campaigners stood in the centre's brightly painted hall and talked to Mobilise staff about what happens next.

"Over the next few weeks we'll review the charity's assets and liabilities, trying to find people who believe they're current members, and making recommendations on the viability of the current organisation," said Micah Gold, from Mobilise. He explained it may be necessary to dissolve the charity and start a new one, as the old 'trustees' have tarnished the Old Barn's good name.

He assured campaigners that there would be a thorough consultation before any options for the centre's future were considered. *THE ARCHER* was told that Barnet Council plans to refurbish the centre and develop new facilities.

Until it fell into the wrong hands, the Old Barn was a thriving community centre for over 25 years. "Over the years volunteers have painted it inside and out, planted trees and run fundraisers," said Cllr Alison Moore. "It echoed to the laughter of a generation and more of young, and not so young, local people."

The only service the 'trustees' provided in four years of mismanagement was a nursery, which was closed by Ofsted in July after 18 months for failing to provide safe childcare.

The Mobilise team is keen to hear from anyone wishing to get involved in reviving the Old Barn. Contact oldbarn@mobilise.org.



Campaigners and Mobilise staff walk through the Old Barn gates. Photo by Mike Coles



The first glimpse of the inside of the Old Barn centre in years.

Photo by Mike Coles

Old Barn campaigners speak out

By Janet Maitland

As the gates to the Old Barn were opened again, *THE ARCHER* spoke to some of the people who'd campaigned so hard over four years to return the venue to the community.

Roger Chapman, local resident: "I look forward to the Old Barn once again becoming a vibrant hub of local community life. It must be supported by Trustees dedicated to maintaining it for local community use. Safeguards are needed so that the Old Barn can never again be taken over by unrepresentative groups with no interest in the community."

Maureen Clemetson, Monday Club leader: "My concern is that there shouldn't be any little loophole to let these people get back into running the Old Barn. My dream is that the children of East Finchley will no longer be roaming the streets like Nomads, but will be restored to their rightful place and have somewhere they can go."

Helen Drake, local parent: "The

experience of the last few years has exposed poor practice at the Charity Commission, an organisation funded by the taxpayer to regulate charities. In the case of the Old Barn, they failed miserably. Something fundamental went wrong. I need to be reassured that the commission has taken steps to prevent a case like this ever happening again."

Michele Haniotis, founder member of the Old Barn Action Group: "There are still important issues to address, including more consultation with the local community and the terms of the new lease with Barnet Council. I call on the interim trustee, Mobilise, to arrange an AGM as soon as possible to elect a new, representative management to ensure

that the Old Barn's future is truly what the community wants."

Jon Woolfson, local resident: "I hope the Grange Big Local will play a central role in the future of the building. My one concern is about the existing charity, which has been in the hands of people who weren't interested in the community; it may need to be wound up so that future generations are not burdened by its failures."

East Finchley councillor Arjun Mittra: "It's been tough, but thanks to dedicated local residents we have a breakthrough. The key to making sure that the Old Barn is a success will be to retain community interest and involvement in its running. I hope the Charity Commission will up their game in future."

Old Barn: What happens next?

By Janet Maitland

THE ARCHER asked the Charity Commission how it will protect the Old Barn in the future. Here's what they told us.

THE ARCHER: What action is the Commission taking to ensure that the trustees are disqualified from setting up or becoming trustees of any other charity in the future?

The Charity Commission: The commission currently does not have the power that enables us to disqualify a trustee, or prevent a trustee from setting up, or becoming a trustee of, any other charity in the future. However, we welcome the publication of the Draft Protection of Charities Bill. This makes significant changes to the ways individuals can be disqualified from acting as charity trustees, including a new power to disqualify a person from being a charity trustee where the commission considers them unfit.

In this case the commission has noted for future reference the actions of certain individuals should there be registration applications in the future.

Are you planning to notify the police of possible fraud by the trustees?

I cannot comment on this at this time.

The commission announced in April that the trustees were 'not validly appointed in 2010'. However, your actions between February and October indicate that your approach to the trustees was that they were validly appointed but were simply mismanaging the Old Barn. Then in October, you issued an order

appointing Mobilise because you'd concluded that the charity had 'no properly appointed trustees'. Was it not possible to use your powers to remove the trustees several months ago, given that you'd already decided in April that the trustees weren't validly appointed?

Yes, our view was that in 2010 there were no valid appointments of trustees. However, we had to be assured – through further enquiries, including the use of our powers under s. 52 of the Charities Act – that the position had not been regularised since. This took a little time. In the end, we were fully satisfied that the legal position had never been regularised and therefore we were confident in stating that there were no properly appointed trustees at all, hence the appointment of Mobilise. In this process we also needed to be assured that the association had never been legally dissolved. Our conclusion was that it had never been legally dissolved, hence the Order making a trustee appointment.

What action is the Commission taking to ensure that Companies House is made aware of the recent developments at the Old Barn so that they can take appropriate action in relation to the Old Barn Youth and Community Association Company incorporated on 16 June 2014?

We are informing other regulators as appropriate.

**FREE GOODIE BAGS*
MULLED WINE & MINCE PIES**

* while stocks last.

**SATURDAY
13 DECEMBER
10am-4pm**

**CHRISTMAS
EVENT &
MINI MARKET**

in King Street Mews N2

**a room
in my house**

vintage & handmade

**GIFTS / SOFT FURNISHINGS
JEWELLERY / STATIONERY
FURNITURE / HOMEWARE
CLOTHING / TRINKETS
PLUS CHRISTMAS CARDS
& DECORATIONS**

shop online
aroominmyhouse.com

HOMEWARE.CRAFT.VINTAGE

OPEN FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS

10am-4pm

King Street Mews / East Finchley N2 8DY