



Last chance to fight for our libraries

By Daphne Chamberlain

Campaigners across Barnet, including the East Finchley Library Users Group (EFLUG), have been ensuring that the council realises how much people value their libraries. There is still time for you to do the same until 22 February. At the Finchley and Golders Green Forum last month, library supporters brought up the issues which are disturbing people most.

Key concerns

Under the proposals, unaccompanied under-16s will not be allowed to use libraries when buildings are unstaffed, unless they are with "an appropriate adult such as a teacher". Parents of vulnerable older teenagers are also concerned about the safety of unstaffed buildings. The council says that CCTV cameras and possible on-site security are planned.

Library supporters say that reports of the "open" / closed library being successful elsewhere, for instance in Denmark, are not relevant as circumstances are very different.

If East Finchley library is relocated, how could the current High Road building, where the Grade 2 listing includes library fixtures and fittings, be used for another purpose? The council says it is "developing more detail around specific options".

A new site

Relocating to a "better foot-fall" site would take it away from its central position in East Finchley and further from areas which need a library most, say campaigners. The consultation involving a new Waitrose supermarket and an associated new

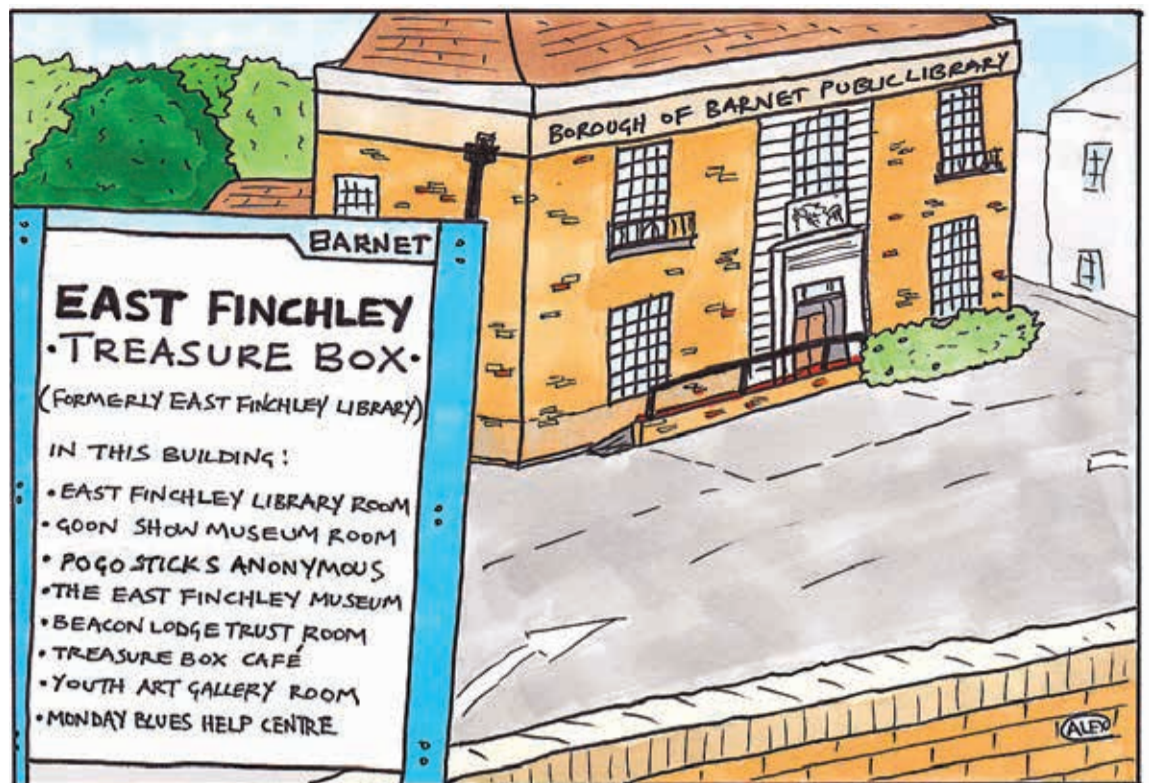
library site near the tube station in 2003 showed how unpopular such a move would be.

Membership of East Finchley Library has grown since then. Currently, the upstairs hall is filled with local students during exam time. Where would they go, if the library was shrunk to one room size? Barnet Council suggests they should travel to one of four study sites across the borough.

Having your say

If you oppose the proposals, sign one of the paper petitions in the streets, the online petition at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/no-to-closure-of-barnet-libraries>, and fill in the council consultation on libraries. This offers three options, all of which involve drastic reduction in size, relocation, complete closure, and / or two-thirds of opening hours in unstaffed buildings.

EFLUG are urging us to do it, but with care. See their website www.eflibrary.com for their advice. The consultation closes on 22nd February. And write to Conservative councillors, especially those with slim majorities. Contact EFLUG for details.



Plenty of life in the library yet

Thanks to Alex Athanasiou for sending in this cartoon to show that our library could have a future as a community hub. Alex, of Western Road, N2, says: "My reason for doing the cartoon is that there seem to be so many things closing down/being moved so maybe why not try and get them all into one place like the library? All these treasures being found at a one-stop shop." His idea chimes with Ruth Kersley's letter on this page.

Library letters special

We've been flooded with letters about the future of East Finchley Library and the library service across Barnet. This letters special is a selection of what you've been saying. Your views were still coming in as we went to press so we hope to print more letters next month.

For the sake of future families...

Dear Editor,

Having been lucky enough to have lived in East Finchley for over 40 years, and having brought up a family of a son and daughter taking full advantage of all the local amenities available, I am now very shocked to hear that our local council is considering closing East Finchley Library which has been a great asset all the time we have lived here.

For the sake of future families, who are increasing all the time, and retired pensioners who use the library on a regular basis, I appeal to your readers to reject any proposals to close East Finchley Library.

It is used by local schools and must be a great advantage in young peoples' education. I appeal to you, once again, on behalf of a large number of the local community to oppose any measures to close East Finchley Library and retain it with qualified, experienced staff.

Yours faithfully,
Norman Cude,
Leopold Road, N2.

Libraries are beacons in an austere world

Dear Editor,

I was deeply shocked to hear of the planned closure of further libraries in Barnet. These are beacons in our world where people can learn, be in an attractive environment irrespective of their means and feel part of a community.

Like many others, I spent a lot of my childhood in libraries, first my local library and then several university libraries, and no one would dispute, except perhaps some Barnet councillors, that their essential role is a 'public good'.

Even my son who has a nice home to study in for his GCSEs got hooked this Christmas holidays on going to Barnet libraries for his revision. He met up with a friend on many days and going to the library became a source of inspiration for them both.

My son reported that in one of the libraries that he went to, the same men in their 40s and over appeared every day. The library was clearly a home for these people, providing friendship, warmth and learning in a world that might otherwise have shut these men out.

I am appalled as a professor at a university that Barnet wishes to wield the axe to this beacon of civilisation, the library. It is act of arrogant barbarism which reflects ill on those wielding power in the borough. At a time of economic deprivation, such as now, it is the very thing that should be maintained and not destroyed in the interests of continuous learning and positive spirit.

Yours faithfully,
Gloria Moss,
Address supplied.

How to keep the library alive

Dear Editor,

We should be finding new ways to make libraries more effective for their communities. These are some suggestions for making better use of the space within our local library:

- Book readings for children, the elderly and adults with mental health issues. Volunteers could be used from within the community.
- Book clubs for adults, the elderly and adults with mental health issues.
- Adult literacy sessions to promote literacy within the adult population.
- Book sessions for those with English as a second language.
- Cafe with wifi internet in separate room and disabled toilet.
- Develop study areas for greater use by school/university students.
- Develop upstairs for dance classes, keep fit, pilates, tumble tots – space to be rented daytime.
- Local orchestras to rent space in evenings for rehearsals.
- Lectures on authors, book launches, links with Black Gull Books in East Finchley.
- Art exhibitions in downstairs space to be rented.
- Workshops and demonstrations.
- Develop the DVD lending library and link with books that inspired the films.
- Special book events for children on Saturday mornings.
- Extra reading sessions for school children after school and help with homework clubs.
- Creative writing courses.
- Poetry reading for adults and children.
- Being part of the 'Cityread' initiative.

The council needs to live up to the sign that greets everyone entering the London Borough of Barnet: "Putting the Community First".

Yours faithfully,
Ruth Kersley,
Abbots Gardens, N2.

Editor's note: This is an edited version of Ruth's original letter to Barnet Council leader Richard Cornelius.

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