



## Old Post Office: letters special

Thank you to everyone who's taken the trouble to give their thoughts on how the old Post Office building in the High Road could be used. Here we print some of the letters we've received this month and we'll find space for more next time round.

### Don't rewrite history

Dear Editor,

In your round-up of readers' views on uses for the old Post Office building in the High Road (January issue) Ulla Mead says she suspects that many people felt pressured to support the successful campaign against the proposed Waitrose "branch" in East Finchley a decade ago, though she admits she wasn't living here at the time.

Let's be clear that Waitrose wanted to build a vast supermarket that would have stretched from the entrance to Cherry Tree Woods opposite the Tube station as far as Baronsmere Road. It would have brought traffic chaos to the High Road and killed many of our excellent small shops. The campaign to stop it, led superbly by local resident Kathryn Scorza, was widely backed. I recall no pressure being put on anyone.

We can have a fresh debate about the merits of another small supermarket in East Finchley. A Waitrose, or indeed a Marks & Spencer or Sainsbury's Local, in the old Post Office would be a very different proposition to what was planned in 2004, though many would still oppose it. But let's not rewrite history.

Yours faithfully,  
David Brindle,  
Durham Road, N2.

### Why we fought against Waitrose in 2003

Dear Editor,

Following recent comments, this seems a good time to review the myth that local opposition was all about stopping Waitrose opening a store in East Finchley. Things were actually much more complicated.

The residents' protest group name "Warning on Waitrose"/WOW, and an eye catching national newspaper headline "The neighbourhood that said no to Waitrose" may have fuelled the perception that the opposition was solely to a supermarket. However, the library was also under threat.

Early in 2003 it emerged that Barnet Council was planning to dispose of Park House (currently rented by Monkey Puzzle Nursery). Proposals for a Waitrose superstore with a car park for around 170 cars and a new library on the first floor were apparently being considered.

If approved, everything from Park House to Baronsmere Road would have been demolished. In exchange for Park House the developers were to provide the new library, leased to the council for 125 years at a peppercorn rent.

Concerns raised at a public meeting which filled All Saints Church to overflowing highlighted increased traffic congestion and the threat to our much-loved, well situated library.

Around 400 people joined WOW, many solely bent on preventing the library proposal. Other worries were the size of the store (clearly intended to attract shoppers into the area) and its negative impact on the neighbourhood, including increased pollution. Knocking down a parade of shops was completely unacceptable.

A public consultation on the future of library services was held which made no mention of the combined proposal. *THE ARCHER* maintained a scrupulously neutral stance throughout, but voiced the views of many residents in condemning the consultation process as selective and even



Front page news: How *The Archer* covered the Waitrose and library campaign in 2003 and 2004.

manipulative.

Many would have welcomed a small Waitrose. WOW might never have been formed had the library not been part of the plan. Library supporters won a Grade II listing for the building, and have continued to fight to maintain a full library.

Could a proposal similar to that of 2003 come up again? Barnet still owns Park House. Compulsory purchase orders were apparently being considered then. While local protest is thought to blow itself out in time, developers and the council are used to playing a longer game.

Yours faithfully,  
Kathryn Scorza,  
Address supplied.

### We have the right shops

Dear Editor,

I was very surprised by the number of people in your survey who thought that the best use for the old post office was a Waitrose or a Marks and Spencer outlet. For me, one of the great attractions of East Finchley is its High Street. Unlike Muswell Hill, it still has a lot of independent shops, including a real fishmonger, several bakeries, a coffee-roaster and numerous other small businesses. This gives it a character all of its own, and helps to foster a sense of community that can only come when customers and shopkeepers have known one another for years.

I would like to single out Tony's Continental for special mention. I doubt that Waitrose will spend hours trimming Christmas trees

to the customer's specification. I don't suppose that Waitrose will sell both handfuls of lychees and whole boxes of them. I suspect that the staff in Waitrose won't know their customers by name, and won't understand their stock in the way that someone who has run a greengrocer's shop for decades understands it.

We should be cherishing our local shops for the treasures that they are, not introducing yet more competition. Tony's prices are also highly competitive with those of the major food retailers, especially on fresh fruit and vegetables.

Shops like Tony's are already under pressure from the change in the parking regulations and the growth of internet shopping. There is a Waitrose and an M&S in Muswell Hill, and enormous Waitrose stores on Holloway Road and in Ballards Lane. There is only one Tony's.

And, finally, to your respondent who thought that people were 'pressurised' into signing the last petition against Waitrose, I've lived in East Finchley long enough to know that folk here are too feisty to be pressurised into doing anything.

Yours faithfully,  
Vivienne Palmer and John Bolitho  
Huntingdon Road, N2.

### Everything we need

Dear Editor,

I write to express my horror at repeated calls for a Waitrose or M&S Food to take over the old Post Office site. East Finchley is blessed with an array of

independent food retailers from greengrocers and delis, fishmongers, bakers and florists: Tony's Continental, Amici Delicatessen, A Scott & Son, Chorak and Josephines to name but a few.

For a small supermarket Budgens has an impressively wide range catering for many cultures (open until 11pm Monday-Saturday) and with Midhurst Butchers just up the road in Fortis Green, there is little I am unable to find on or just off the High Road.

For those that crave the delights of a large chain, there is both a Sainsbury's and a Tesco a short drive or bus ride away. I suspect snobbishness or perhaps a shyness in shopping at those above is behind such calls for another chain but it is vital that we support our current retailers, many of whom have had a presence on the High Road for decades. We need to look to what currently isn't available when thinking of who should fill this retail space.

Yours faithfully,  
Sarah King,  
Kitchener Road, N2.

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