



Letters to the Editor

There must be a better way

Dear Editor,

I expect you have already received numerous letters on the subject of proposed cuts to library services; I know from talking to my friends and neighbours that many of us feel very strongly about this. I am fully aware of the difficulties that councils face in trying to stretch their reduced budgets across different types of provision. Making these decisions cannot be an easy task, but it is so short-sighted to propose cuts to library services. With enough determination, and commitment from the council and the local community working together, there must be a better solution. In an era where local people want to prevent the loss of communal identity, services should in fact be expanding. Libraries can and do provide essential benefit to a community, not only in terms of access to books, but also of group activities, reading to children, toy library facilities, and many more.

There are even more ways that libraries could be used to help foster communal identity and provide a focus for otherwise isolated individuals: these services should be an essential part of David Cameron's famous (but now seldom mentioned) 'big society'.

Yours faithfully, Hazel Mason, Address supplied.

Paradise lost

Dear Editor,

On page 4 of January's ARCHER two people have made the bizarre suggestion that the library be relocated to the old Post Office, although one did say: "...the old Post Office may be too large for the library". I hope this was meant tongue-in-cheek, but I fear not.

The usable space in the old Post Office is less than 20% of that in the existing wonderful, purpose-built building, and would be completely inadequate. Our library is ideally sited in the middle of the borough, next to Martin Primary School, with comparatively easy parking, whereas the old Post Office has none of these advantages.

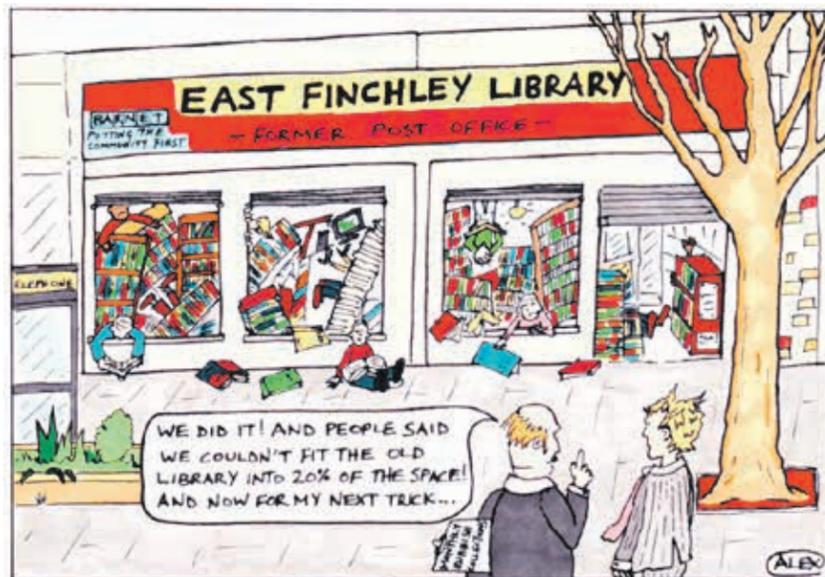
TS Eliot wrote that: "The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man". Another writer said: "I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library". Our library is a kind of Paradise - only a barbarian would disagree. Or our council, which amounts to the same thing.

Yours faithfully, Peter Cox Hertford Road, N2.

More than just a book lending service

Dear Editor,

I am writing about Barnet Council's proposal to make cuts to its libraries across the borough. As an East Finchley resident, I am extremely concerned about the three options on offer in the consultation. None of them is acceptable. I understand that the council has a shrinking financial envelope that could well worsen after the latest local authority funding grant settlement from central government. But what is on offer



'ANOTHER FINE MESS'

is not the right way forward. The council must seek the views of Barnet residents, young and old, about what they want from the library service and where they want it. After all, the long term trend demonstrated in usage figures is an increase in members. It also needs to consider the recommendations in the recently published Independent Library Report for England before making any decision. The library service can be different things to different people but fundamentally it is about promoting the wellbeing of all in the community. I do not accept the suggestion in the consultation that, if there are no cuts to the library, cuts will have to be made to other parts of the themed budget with which libraries have been grouped. That is simply too short-sighted, for reduced library provision can only increase demand on other parts of that budget and possibly on adult social services budgets as well. In the case of East Finchley, whilst all of the council's options offer us some kind of 'library provision', a small room without professional library staff does not a library make. Users are not just taking out books. Young and old find it a safe haven for research and support. I have heard young people say how they do their homework there every day when there is no room to do it at home. Teenagers have said they could not have passed GCSEs without revising in the quiet of the library. And school children are taken there because there is no school library. I have completed the consultation online and trust the council will consider the views of respondents to the consultation who decline, like myself, to choose any of the three terrible options. The community feel very strongly indeed.

Yours faithfully, Vanessa Carpenter Baronsmere Road, N2.

Make short-term savings

Dear Editor,

The reason stated for the threatened closure of our library is to help to plug a hole in Barnet's finances during the next four or five years. But it is highly unlikely that the hoped-for rental or sale of the building could be achieved during that period, if at all, given its listed status.

Barnet Council says that the financial problem is caused by further reductions in government

spending. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer has recently announced that the country's deficit had already been halved, and that the budget will be in surplus within about three years.

The sensible policy is therefore to adjust the way the library is run on a temporary basis, so as to achieve short-term savings, while keeping it in existence and ready for full operation as soon as financial circumstances improve.

Once the library has gone, it has gone.

Yours faithfully, Leslie Gilbert, Chandos Road, N2.

There is another way

Dear Editor,

It is with disappointment that I read in THE ARCHER that Barnet Council is again reviewing a number of our communities' most valuable assets, our local libraries. The three options it proposes are not appropriate.

I fully understand that Government and local Governments need to address their balance sheets. However, we should avoid doing this in a short-sighted manner. There is little wisdom in whittling away one of the few surviving services that help to make a community a desirable place to live and work.

Libraries provide educational opportunities for local children and social connectivity for mothers/guardians, pensioners, job seekers and a myriad others that benefit from such a service. An open forum to all ages, classes and cultures is what makes our local libraries such an important part of our community fabric.

Lest we forget, East Finchley Library is located in our most significant and possibly the only remaining civic building in East Finchley. Despite being Grade II listed, it has already been demonstrated that the building can adapt and comply to provide a first class library service for the future.

The importance of such a resource was highlighted by Tricia Little (former Head of library services, Barnet) in her letter to the Barnet Press in October where she states that in 2002 Barnet achieved Beacon status for Libraries and was looked at as a model of excellence and hosted visits from librarians across Britain. She refers to the three options in the current consultation/questionnaire as "devastating".

I do not feel the current ques-

tionnaire is proactive as all three options focus on ways to reduce the service to save money. Question 13 is the only time an entrepreneurial spirit and intelligent solutions are hinted at, where options to improve the library services could actually increase revenues, a far better and more positive approach to a financial solution whilst responding to today's milieu. Turn this dire situation into a win-win scenario.

Yours faithfully, James Elliott, Baronsmere Road, N2.

Editor's note: This is an edited version of a letter Mr Elliott sent directly to Richard Cornelius, leader of Barnet Council.

Location, location, location

Dear Editor

The idea of using the old post office as a library is nonsense for four reasons. First, it is far too small to provide space for children, adults, computers and cafe.

Secondly, the library was deliberately built near Martin Primary School so that each class can easily visit the library.

Thirdly, the library is located in the middle of the neighbourhood, being equidistant between the tube station and the North Circular so that no resident has to walk more than 400-600 metres.

Finally, it is a lovely building that is already doing a great job as a library.

Yours faithfully, Andrew Wilks, Hertford Road, N2.

Alive and kicking

Dear Editor,

It was sad to see in your January issue people saying they would welcome Waitrose or another major supermarket chain taking over the our vacated Post Office building, especially alongside so much coverage of the public library debate.

Whether they have short memo-

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ries or simply lack awareness, people need reminding of the campaign just a few years ago to stop Waitrose opening a large store in the congested area opposite East Finchley tube station. This went with plans to close the library, by which Waitrose would win planning gain by offering some measly kind of library space on top of its store.

Obviously this spelled doom for our small local independent shops and there was a threat to Martin School playing field if the library was sold off, as well as to Cherry Tree Wood. Local residents rallied around against this in many ways and it was the strongest show of community spirit I have ever seen in all my years in East Finchley. It must not be so casually forgotten. But fortunately some of this spirit looks to be still alive and kicking.

Yours faithfully, Gayle Goshorn, Pulham Avenue, N2.

Lost wedding ring

Dear Editor,

I have lost my wedding ring. It slipped off my finger between Leopold Road and Church Lane, N2, in January. I walked up to the corner, crossed over into Leslie Road and walked on the left, and when I got to Church Lane the ring had gone.

I am very annoyed. My darling husband has passed away after 60 years of marriage and now our wedding ring has gone. My daughter and I went looking for it but to no avail.

I'd be so grateful if anyone has found it and is good enough to hand it in.

Yours faithfully, Mrs A O'Reilly, Leopold Road, N2.

Editor's note: If you can help, please contact us here at THE ARCHER on the-archer@lineone.net or Freephone 0800 612 0748. Thank you.

Holy Trinity Church Church Lane, East Finchley Church of England

We're a warm and friendly congregation who look forward to welcoming you

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Children's Sunday Club ♦ Meet over coffee after church Michael Stanway is happy to answer any enquiries:

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www.holytrinityeastfinchley.org.uk

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